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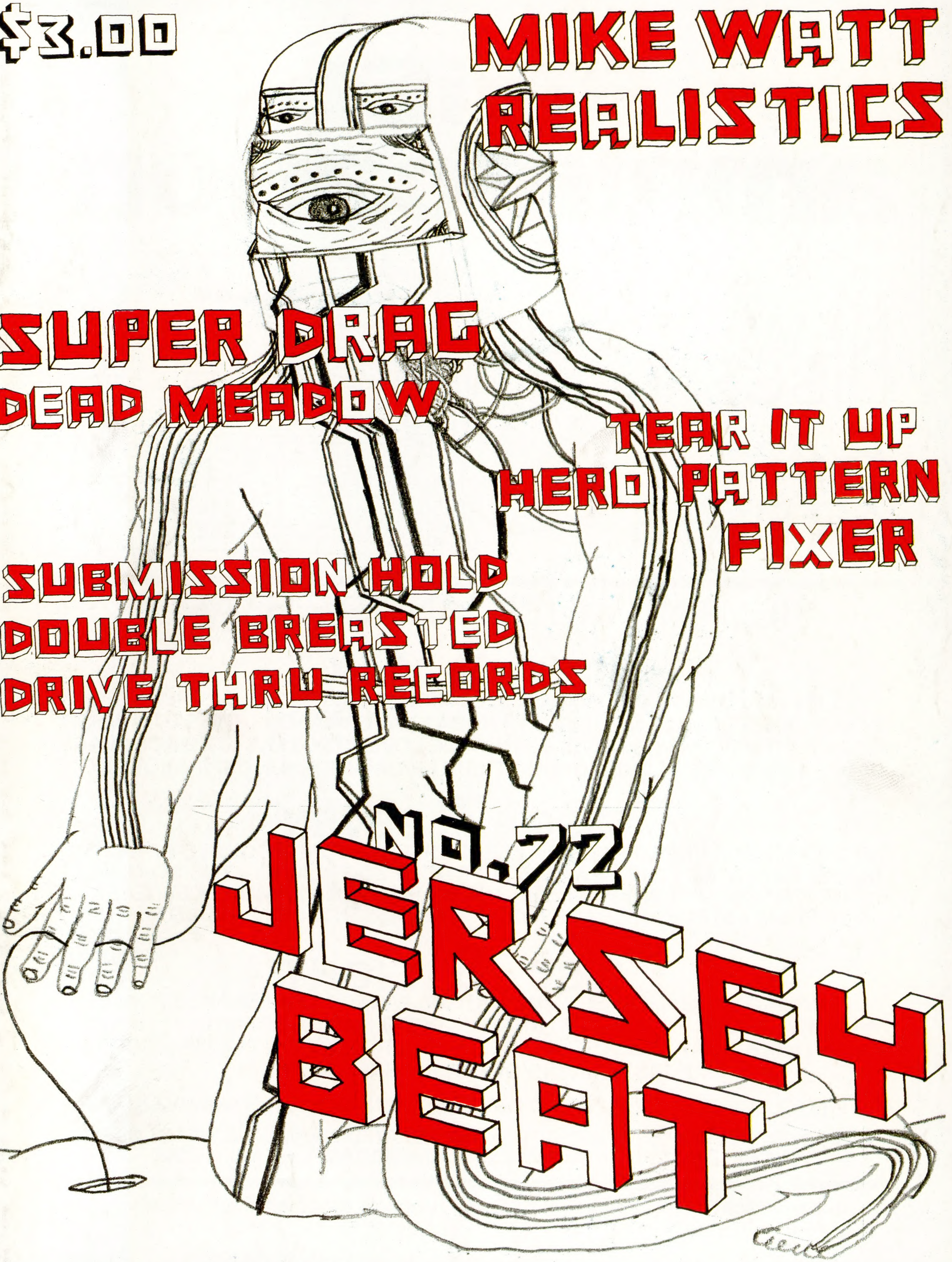

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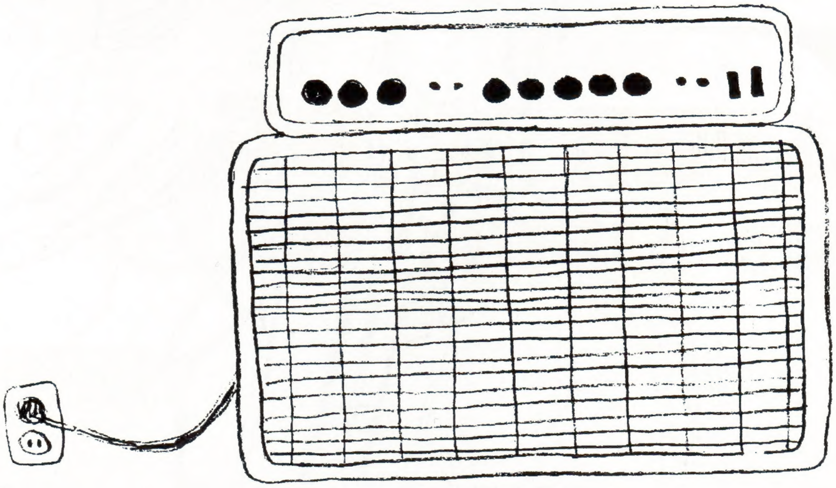

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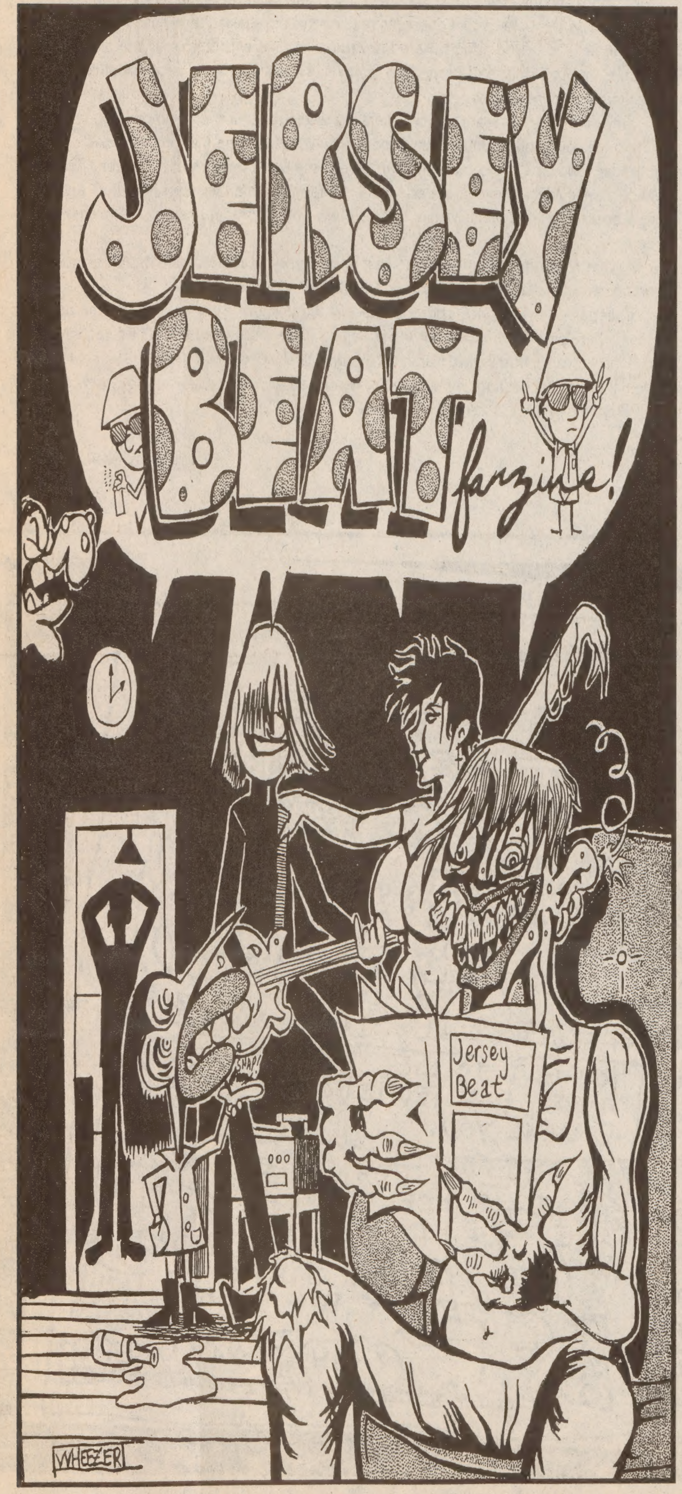
Jersey Beat

Issue #72 Fall/Winter 2002



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Editorial

The Unheard Scene

RIP: American Standard. Aviso'Hara. Kid With Man Head. Bob Fields. Plug Spark Sanjay. Dewey Defeated. And has anyone seen Prosolar Mechanics lately?

The last year has seen a true changing of the guard in New Jersey's indie rock scene. This is nothing new, and I trust me, I ought to know. Bands break up all the time. It's part of the natural process of any music scene. But the loss of these bands over the last few months really hurts. These were not just self-contained groups that went about their business. These were bands that could headline a club like Maxwells and sell it out. They were all bands that networked, that toured, that made connections, that brought a little bit of New Jersey down to W.E. Fest in North Carolina, and brought that W.E. Fest spirit of communality back home with them. These were bands that actively sought to bring bands from other parts of the country into New Jersey clubs. American Standard was the band that talked Fugazi into playing Maxwell's for the first time. And man, could they put on a show. Same with Kid With Man Head, who probably hold the record for winning the most Asbury Music Awards with their high-energy pop-punk hi-jinks. Doug Forbes of Bob Fields was the driving force behind the four groundbreaking IMF festivals that did more to unite New Jersey's underground rock scene than anything else in the Nineties. Aviso'Hara, Plug Spark Sanjay, and Prosolar Mechanics pushed the envelope on what indie could rock be, and made music that was beyond comparison.

So hail and farewell, old friends, and may you all find success and happiness in your future endeavors. Amy and Alex of Prosolar Mechanics are now married, and promise that they will return to the scene. Most of the members of Plug Spark Sanjay have reformed into a new band, The Rosario Focus. Members of Aviso'Hara carry on in Slow Wire, Sparks Fly From A Kiss, and the Clydesdales. Gay Elvis of KWMH has ana amzing new power-pop band called The Blakes. And Doug Forbes just announced that he will be promoting shows at Asbury Park's venerable Fastlane, once one of the premier venues in the state.

And then there's Artist Amplification, the promotional organization headed by longtime scenester Andy Gesner and his younger protégé, Val Emmich. Together, they are promoting successful shows in Jersey's best clubs and releasing compilation albums that are exposing a new generation of bands to the public.

Among the Artist Amp family, there are any number of very promising band and solo artists: Val Emmich, Small AM, double-breasted, Hero Pattern, Alfonso Velez, Planet Janet, and many others. And there are still plenty of good bands soldiering on: Evelyn Forever, Little T and One Track Mike, the Milwaukees, True Love, the Swimmies, Nipple, the Rosenbergs, and many, many more... And hey, the Wrens - one of the most critically hailed New Jersey bands of the Nineties - are making a comeback this year.

Some of you reading this are probably nodding your heads, remembering shows at the Court Tavern and the Melody Bar, the Budapest Café and Maxwells, and wondering where the good old days went. And a lot of people reading this are shaking their heads and wondering what the hell I'm talking about. Here I am eulogizing the end of an era, and all I'm talking about is that one small part of the New Jersey music community . The part that catches the attention of us here at Jersey Beat.

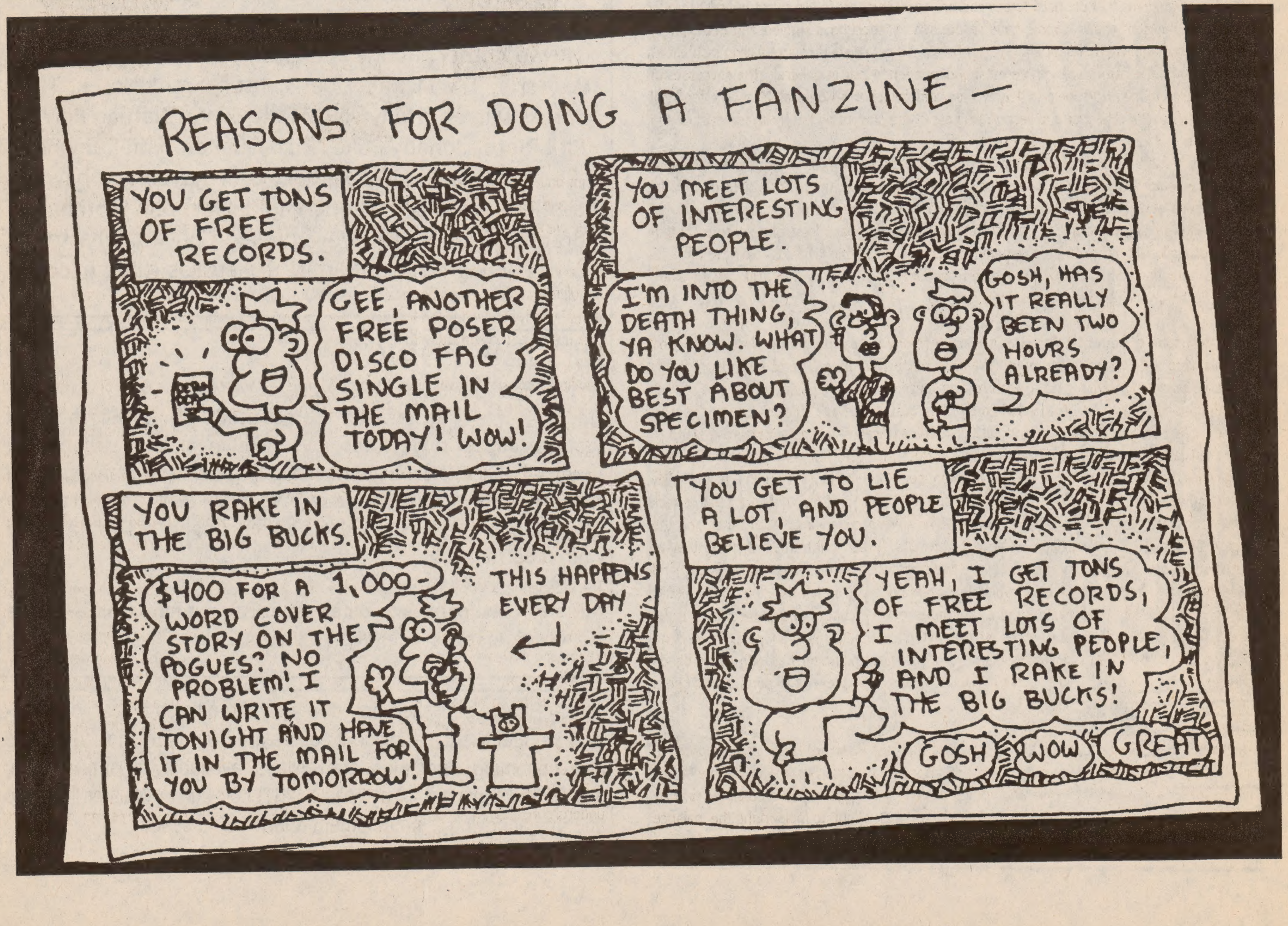
Believe me, we're aware of that. There's a whole other scene going on in South Jersey, playing the Saint and Brighton Bar There's a NJ metal scene that pretty much flies under our radar, and an all-ages punk and hardcore scene that's the envy of the nation. There are bands playing every weekend at Uncle Joe's in Jersey City that I've never heard of. And there are probably 50 good bands within 5 miles of my front door that I haven't discovered either. Yet.

Which is really the point of all this. Last issue, Jersey Beat celebrated its 20th anniversary, and people ask, what keeps you going? As if we had a choice.

If, as James T. Kirk once said, the future is the unknown country, it is also the unheard scene. There's so much music out there waiting to be discovered that all we can say do is echo the words we heard Dave Marsh tell a room full of jaded rock critics at SXSW not too long ago: If you're not hearing anything you're excited about, you're not listening closely enough.

Welcome to the 21st Century. Let's roll.

- Jim Testa, October 2002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THIS HAPPENS EVERY DAY
YOU GET TO LIE A LOT, AND PEOPLE BELIEVE YOU.
YEAH, I GET TONS OF FREE RECORDS, I MEET LOTS OF INTERESTING PEOPLE, AND I RAKE IN THE BIG BUCKS!
GOSH
WOW
GREAT

commentary

Williamsburg VS NJ: Why Our Scene Is Falling Behind

by Tris McCall

Did you ever stare at a map of the world and wonder how archipelagos, like Hawaii or the Aleutians, formed in such improbably perfect lines? Well, probably not, but I have, and I'd like to tell you how. It seems the continental plates – the same ones that are always drifting – have "hot spots" in them, holes that extend down to the magma beneath the earth's crust. As the plate moves, the hole moves with it, throwing up towers of rock and ash from the bottom of the ocean, and eventually creating an island. But as the hot spot migrates, the island stays – slowly cooling and eroding, giving its rock and ash back to the sea. The same hot spot, the same source of heat and energy, creates each of the islands in sequence, and by tracing the trajectory of its motion, you are actually reading a historical record, written in stone and sand.

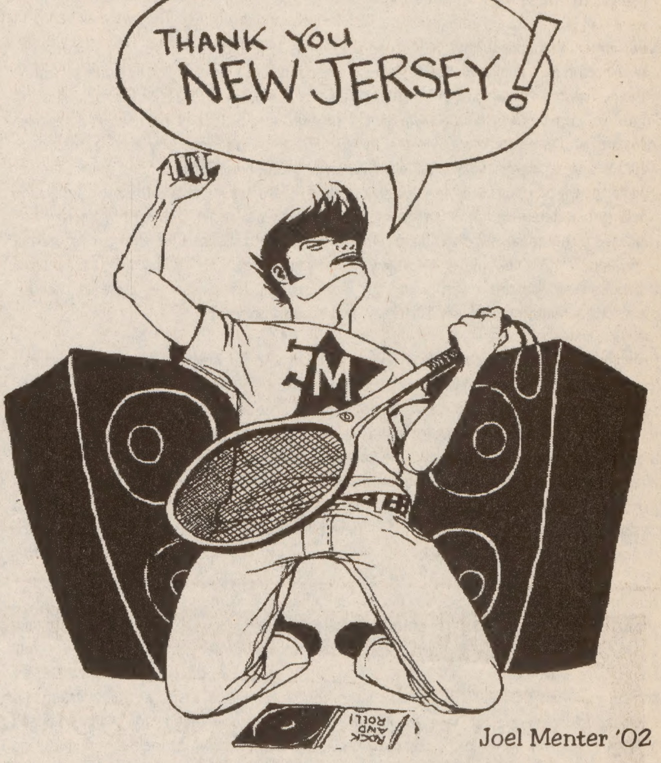
Before I was born – and probably before you were born, too – the center of gravity for independent rock and pop music was Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village. By the time I was a kid, that center of gravity had drifted east to the Bowery and St. Mark's Place. When I first arrived in the New York metro area to play music, the hot spot had again shifted – first east, to Avenue A, and then south across Houston to Stanton Street, Ludlow, Orchard, through the old tenement district, and finally across the East River to Bedford Avenue in Williamsburg. Today, as studios, music stores, hip clubs and restaurants continue to sprout up on Lorimer and Grand Streets beyond the BQE, the eastward migration of the font of greatest cultural experimentation shows no sign of slowing.

For those of us who have chosen to stick it out here on the left bank of the Hudson, it has been a daunting and troublesome experience watching the hot spot recede further and further away on the eastern horizon. The closing of Manhattan clubs like Brownies and the Cooler coupled with the increasing relevance of Williamsburg venues like Luxx, Galapagos, and Northsix now means that die-hard Jersey rockers often must cross two rivers in order to play or attend important shows. Some have responded by affecting a studied and occasionally hostile stance against "Williamsburg chic"; others have established countervailing institutions capitalizing on the resurgence of interest in independent music in general. The successes of Artist Amplification, Uncle Joe's in Jersey City, and frequent sellouts at Maxwell's for local artists testify to the resilience and resourcefulness of the players on the North Jersey rock and pop scene.

That said, it's silly for us to pretend that the indie rock boom in Williamsburg hasn't damaged us. We're hemorrhaging talent – every day, North Jersey musicians pack up their drumsticks and Gibsons and relocate to Brooklyn neighborhoods. We're hemorrhaging resources, as people with a project and a little money to blow routinely bypass Jersey and set up shop in Kingsborough. But most of all, we're hemorrhaging what little hip credibility we have left – as articles, attention, and national recognition continue to accrue to the Williamsburg avant garde, Jersey music has been increasingly ignored.

In an atmosphere like this, it's tough to blame anybody for bailing out on North Jersey and transplanting their project in Brooklyn. The endlessly proliferating Williamsburg record labels and production companies tend to feature acts that in some way push the margins of rock convention; here, labels are either extremely conservative or have little to do with the local scene. Every corner, restaurant, and café on Bedford Avenue seems to feature a stand of new publications dedicated to local cultural production; here, not only are there no arts magazines, but the *Jersey Journal* recently discontinued both its music column and its weekly events guide. The past few years have witnessed the opening of many new and viable rock venues on both sides of the BQE, all within easy walking distance of each other and the region's commercial center; here, we've got Maxwell's (which still trumps anything they've got) but beyond the establishment of Uncle Joe's, growth has been scanty, sporadic, and decentralized. Here, the indie rock subculture stops once you've left the club, or the Guitar Bar, or the local section of Tunes; there, the indie rock subculture seems to dominate the street, pervade every establishment, define the rhythms and patterns of daily life. There is no Whiskey Bar or Boo Boo's of Williamsburg – no post-fraternity beer hall with cover bands playing "Under The Bridge" to ex-jocks in painter's caps. For geeks of all sorts, music geeks included, it's a comfortable place to be.

The forces that have pushed the hot spot across the East River are large and complicated, and nearly impossible to undo. We can't stop continental drift. But if you, like me, are a Jersey rocker and a Jersey loyalist, and you're tired of getting your ass kicked all the time by Brooklyn, I outline here for you a four-point plan that ought to help right the balance somewhat, or at the very least, allow us to recuperate a little dignity.



Joel Menter '02

Point one: **Re-establish the Independent Music Festival.** Doug Forbes and his pals in the IMG have earned their reputations as true heroes of New Jersey indie music. Unfortunately, their biannual festival was discontinued at the precise moment that it had begun to achieve serious currency among Williamsburg musicians. The IMF was not nominally a Jersey event, but since it was always held in one of the major hubs of North Jersey music (and since the headline acts were invariably locals), it indisputably functioned as one. Since it seems unlikely that anybody involved in the IMG will revive the festival anytime soon, somebody else needs to pick up the baton and run with it.

The final Hoboken festival came under fire for being too large, too monochromatic/male, and too unwelcome by its host city. All of those charges were justified. Nevertheless, it was also the richest and most exciting musical event I've ever attended, one that managed to imprint a subculture and impart a creative energy to a great rock city that has become increasingly conservative and staid. For five days, New Jersey became a rock destination, as Brooklyn artists rode the PATH train in order to perform, listen, and participate in a homegrown event that offered the authority of a benevolent institution while retaining the flexibility and spontaneity of an uprising. Since then, all traffic has gone in the opposite direction.

The Independent Music Festival was more than a schedule of groups and an array of great shows. It was the Jersey scene's best consolidating mechanism, more a convention than anything else, a chance to put names to faces, share ideas, and become immersed in the trends and movements happening statewide. The cross-pollination and camaraderie bred by the IMF continues to sustain much of the cohesion that characterizes Jersey music, but two years later the luster has faded to a dim glint. The Jersey indie rock calendar, briefly fixed and coordinated by the certainty of the spring and fall events, has lost its lodestone, and area musicians are now more attuned to Manhattan and Brooklyn-based money-grab events (you know what I'm talking about) than to anything happening locally. But we can fix that, and in the process restore to life a festival that actually *did* function as alternative, cool, underground-edgy and driven by subcultural energy, and not as a breeding ground for careerists and status-seekers.

Point two: **Launch an intelligent arts/listings publication for Hudson County and North Jersey.** So you're a local Jersey group, and you've just put out an independent recording. You want to get reviewed, maybe have a record release party at an area club, get some publicity and attention for your achievement. Where do you turn? The *Star-Ledger* and *Bergen Record* aren't options, the *Jersey Journal* can't help you anymore, the *Aquarian* and *EC Rocker* aren't published frequently enough (and maintain a narrow focus on musical styles that are, in the face of Williamsburg's cultural currency, passé), and the *Hudson Current* – the weekly which appears so promising from a distance! – runs nothing but feature stories, has no scene presence, and is almost completely inaccessible. Inevitably, you are forced to turn to New York City publications, and you have been reduced to yet another instantiation of that quintessentially Jersey phenomenon: the local artist fruitlessly begging out-of-town writers to cover his or her activities.

New Jersey independent rock music and art – this rich and varied tapestry of countless interrelated but distinct projects, each deserving comment is ridiculously underserved by area journalists. A newly-launched arts and listings magazine for Hudson County and North Jersey would instantly be flooded with demos, full releases, invitations and concert dates from local artists starved for recognition. I have heard all the reasons why such a publication would not be commercially or aesthetically viable, and upon reflection, I find them all either illogical, overly pessimistic, or, in the case of the oft-heard argument that the Latin population would not be interested in a listings magazine, downright racist. And if the Internet has rendered print magazines superfluous, then why is Williamsburg – no stranger to the net savvy, surely – the host of countless new listings magazines, with dozens more on the way? If Brooklyn can support (even briefly) its scores, surely Jersey can set aside its proudly-professed anti-intellectualism and illiteracy, and support one.

Point three: **Take the Uncle Joe's initiative and run with it.** Anybody who maintained that there was no room for another rock club in Hudson County was put to shame by the successful commencement of shows at Uncle Joe's, a nowhere bar on a nowhere street in Jersey City that has quickly established itself as an important venue and a viable alternative to the Hoboken club scene. Certainly there has been no shortage of area groups willing to invite their fan base out to the semi-industrial setting, and an increasing number of Brooklyn bands – hipster bands who'd never condescend to playing the Harvest Moon, Loop Lounge, or a comparable Jersey dive or microbrewery – have been crossing the Hudson to take their place on the imaginary stage in the back room and contend with the questionable sound system.

How many bars are there in Hudson County with unused back rooms, ready to play host to a show that will fill the building with patrons, raise its profile, carve out a bit of legend and take some small part in music or performance culture? How many warehouses and empty buildings are idle along the waterfront, sitting quietly on one of the plank roads, waiting for someone with a vision and a wallet to breathe life into the space, install a sound system and a stage, and generate our own version of Northsix? I hope that every commercial and industrial property owner in the county (especially those who own properties within walking distance of a PATH stop) is looking at Uncle Joe's and kicking himself, thinking "I could have had that business, those crowds, that caché, if I had swallowed my resistance and booked a few groups." We are clearly nowhere near a saturation point – both supply and demand for performances is not sated by our current range of options. And rather than competing for the same limited audience, another club – a classier one, maybe – located near Uncle Joe's in Jersey City would reinforce a much needed feeling that something exciting has taken hold and is happening, and will encourage more New Yorkers to forget their reservations and prejudices and participate wholeheartedly in our scene.

Point four, and the most crucial: **We must all raise our games.** As a notorious local booster and state ambassador it pains me terribly to admit this, but it's impossible to fudge: Jersey indie rock writ large is simply not as good as Brooklyn rock – not as interesting, not as committed to experimentation and taking chances, not as stylish, not as sexy, not as conceptual, not as discursive or as communicative, not as good. We are chasing those guys because they are better than we are, and admitting that the discrepancy exists is the first step toward filling the chasm. Even at the best North Jersey clubs, far too frequently the music we hear is absurdly formulaic, completely beholden to generic conventions, whether those of standard-issue emo, or skate or radio punk, or the dreadful DMB-jam band influence that has infected the state during the past several years. In these instances, the famous New Jersey knee-jerk dismissal of anything that seems hip or trendy doesn't help matters. It's served us well over the years, but lately, it's been little more than an avoidance strategy, and a threadbare one at that.

None of this is to suggest that the Williamsburg scene is flawless; far from it. Female and multi-ethnic voices are rarely heard, and women are subtly marginalized. The sudden influx of capital has slowed the pace of experimentation somewhat, and the current garage-rock vogue has grown tiresome. Camaraderie blends uncomfortably into competitiveness, and an undercurrent of cutthroat sentiment, made manifest by gossip, backbiting, and defaced posters, occasionally gives a negative valence to the charged atmosphere. Regardless, the musical record is undeniable, and if the competition and seriousness with which people take indie music can occasionally be oppressive, it also serves to keep standards high. Here, we have long been far too apt to help cultivate projects that indulge in excess or lapse into autopilot, or thoughtlessness – projects that would wilt under Brooklyn's harsher light. The Williamsburg indie rock scene is improved by its diligence as surely as ours is so often discredited through our critical sloppiness.

There was, at one point, a local magazine of relatively considerable circulation that promised comprehensive coverage of Jersey arts. I anticipated it with high hopes. But when I read it, I was completely appalled – not only was the journalism shoddy and the syntax and diction graceless, but it was rife with grammatical and typographic errors. Its effect was to reinforce every out-of-towner's worst prejudice of New Jerseyans as uneducated and thoughtless mooks, congenitally clumsy, miles removed from anything that could be mistaken for sophistication or sensitivity. I expected the publication to be condemned and shunned, (or mocked, at the very least) but instead, Jersey artists lined up to win its favor and to be featured in its pages, or on its equally embarrassing website. Without a doubt this reflected our limited publicity options; still, it wouldn't have happened in Brooklyn. If we ever hope to be on equal footing with our Kingsborough peers, we first must raise our expectations and demand from ourselves a much greater degree of sophistication.

The irony of this all is that North Jersey is a considerably more interesting place than Brooklyn. Development here has occurred in unusual and unprecedented patterns; Williamsburg's gentrification has been wearying in its predictability. Politics here are fascinating; politics there are not. Our public life bears the imprint of *some* cultural cross-pollination between different ethnic groups (though nowhere near what it should); in North Brooklyn there is virtually no site of intersection between the new white settlers and the old Hasidic, Polish, and Latino communities. North Jersey is characterized by odd, unsettling, and occasionally inspiring juxtapositions; Williamsburg feels homogenous by comparison. All of this ought to be apparent within the music we make and the subcultures we create – and occasionally it is, but far too infrequently. But because there are so many passionate loyalists on the left bank of the Hudson, we have it within our power to re-create this scene, and make it better than it's ever been. If you're reading this, and you're moved to do something about the state of North Jersey rock, to open a club, or start a magazine, to participate in a festival, know well that if you make your intention public, you will never be short on volunteers willing to put the full weight of their minds, backs, and hearts into the project.

As Jersey artists, we step into the box with two strikes against us. We live in the shadow of the world's largest city, and the center of its entertainment industry; a huge engine of cultural production absorbing attention and energy. Then, we deal daily with uninformed and preposterous stereotypes about our state; that we're uneducated and unsophisticated, that we're mobsters or wacky convenience store clerks, that roving herds of frat thugs and mallrats with big hair will accost you on the street if you aren't wearing a Whitesnake t-shirt. Arrogant New Yorkers will not come here, and, increasingly, they do not have to. Tempting as it is in our famous defiance to write them off and pretend they aren't there, it's an impossible, foolish thing to do here in the shadow of the Empire State Building. Whether we like it or not, our principal relationship is to the New York scene, and right now, we've got the short end of that relationship, and our grip is slipping.

Part Deux Point Five: "All my friends are strangers" or "All my friends (and family) are hackneyed rock critics who wanna hone in on my action!"

Hey Howdy Ho kids! Back again after more than a year with another dose of mind blowin', deep throatin', 'do-the-locomotion' thoughts from my head that you can feel free to skip right over. There's probably a very exciting ad for Interpunk.com on the very next page. Go ahead and read it! It's okay. I don't mind. If I had cash I'd invest in NOFX biker shorts as well. Do the right thing.

The reason there was no column last issue comes down to one thing: censorship. That's right! Big daddy Jim thought my last missive so shocking, so controversial that in a last minute email he wrote me he exclaimed, "Oliver, do you realize the people this will offend? The advertisers that will pull out of the issue if your column is allowed to run!? The whole Jersey Beat Empire (an AOL / Time Warner subsidiary) is riding on a big, fat check from Interpunk.com! " And with that he pulled the plug on my last column. If you care to read it just write to Jim. He'll deny it exisits at first but keep pressing.

Well I promised to be good this issue so I will not write about anything shocking or offensive. So let's talk music criticism!!! No wait! Come back! I promise this will be good. Really.

It occurred to me awhile back while I was composing some reviews for this very rag that every aspect of the "punk scene" (also an AOL-Time Warner subsidiary) is all based on the understanding of the entire history of the "punk scene." Let me explain. Punk bands create punk music based on archetypes set by previous punk bands, and reviewers for punk fanzines review these punk bands' music usually in terms of how they sound compared to the punk band they most closely identify with. Still confused? I bet that Interpunk.com ad on the next page is looking pretty good right about now? Well here's an easy example: The Ramones, one of the pioneering punk bands (or the "original punk band dude!" depending on how historically accurate/anally retentive you want to be) wrote a song on their first album called "Judy is a Punk." Eighteen years later, The Riverdales wrote a song called "Judy Go Home' where the first line is, "hey, hey punk rock girl / go home Judy / Judy go home." That is a clear reference to "Judy is a Punk." The song on the first Ramones record. The first Ramones record was also covered in it's entirety by the band Screeching Weasel who briefly broke up in 1993 with some of the members going on to form...The Riverdales, who wrote the song "Judy Go Home!" And so on and so forth.

So as you can see, you would have never known that had you not been aware of the Ramones, Screeching Weasel or The Riverdales. But as a certified "punk rock dude or dudette," you were. That is because the whole punk scene revolves in and around itself with no real regard to outside influence. This all became acutely aware to me in a blinding flash of light as I was typing up some reviews. The thought paralyzed me so that I was forced to stop typing and go sit in front of my television for about five hours until I had properly calmed down. It wasn't so much the notion that the punk scene was insular that scared the piss outta me, but the thought that I may be wasting my life. Sure I could sit and write five hundred words debating the merits of the Dead Kennedys "Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables" vs. Minor Threat's "Bottled Violence" on the grounds that the same themes were being argued in two different ways on two different coasts, but who outside of the "punk scene" would care!?! (Then again, who IN the "punk scene" would care?) I could do countless reviews making all kinds of references to bands sounding "post-Squirrel Bait" or "ripping their guitar licks off Lenny Kaye" but would the guy walking down the street in the Abercrombie & Fitch shirt, with the cargo shorts and Birkenstock sandals on, had he somehow been forced to read my review (maybe they threatened to take his hackeysack away), understand what the hell I was talking about!?! Would he respect me more? Would he gain anymore insight into this musical subgenre that we have all embraced? Would he not punch me if I didn't give him his hackeysack back? The answer: probably not. That was the thought which sent me into paralysis.

Once my paralysis wore off I was instilled with a sense of purpose. I would find out what the "non-punk" people thought of our music. How would they react? Would they embrace it or turn away in fear. Could our Rancid's and NOFX's stand up to their Creed's and Limp Bizkit's? Or has it all been a 20+ year experiment in useless nonsense. I had to know. So with that I quickly rounded up the most "non-punk" people I knew who would work for free. Those people ended up being, my roommate, my girlfriend, and my sister. I gave them the cd's Jim had sent me to review and charged them to write a review based on their overall opinions of the music. The results were fascinating. Read on and see. The first review I did to get the ball rolling and show my "non punk" friends and family how a "professional rock journalist" does a review. All spelling and grammar mistakes are those of the reviewer. You've been warned.

ATOM AND HIS PACKAGE -- "Hamburgers EP"
After releasing what was arguably his best work ("Redefining Music") and by "best work" I mean songs that weren't just funny or ironic but songs that actually "rocked ass", Atom and his tiny beat machine return with a 5-song EP. While not as ass rockin' as his last effort, "Hamburgers" is musically on the same page but lyrically on another planet. "Sebastian in Nigeria" is pretty funny but nothing compared to "If You Own the Washington Redskins You're A Cock." If you're a fan you'll buy, if you're not, you suck. - Oliver "goddamn music journalist" Lyons

AGAINST ME - *Reinventing Axl Rose*
I think that it would have been better if I had never heard this CD. They just kept yelling and were obviously very upset. I had high hopes after reading the song titles. I figured no band could go wrong with songs like "Pints of Guinness Make You Strong," and "Scream It Until You're Coughing Up Blood." Unfortunately, it turned out that "Pints Of Guinness Make You Strong," is about some old women who's husband is dead and "Scream It Until You're Coughing Up Blood," is actually a song called "Jamaican Me Crazy," which not only is a much less cool title, but sucks to boot. Well they've got it half right; cool song titles (for the most part), but shitty songs.- Keirnan "roommate" Lamarche

Live Ghetto For Less

by oliver lyons

THE GUTS - *The Sensitive Side of The Guts*
All right, wussy punk! Yeah now I can deal with this. The hard-core stuff with all the screaming and crying just doesn't do it for me. But this inoffensive, Blink-182 type stuff isn't so bad. One of the band members is even wearing a Green Day™ shirt on the cover. Its refreshing to see a band advertise their type of music by displaying the name of a band that they are trying to sound like right on the cover of their CD. It takes the guess work out of buying crappy music.- Keirnan "roommate" Lamarche

THE NOGOODS- *Better Than Beer*
I can't understand what they're singing without reading the lyrics. Why can't they enunciate their words!?! They remind me of the Dancehall Crashers on a few of the songs off of their "Lockjaw" album but I like the Dancehall Crashers, not this. This is boring. The rthym and the riffs are too repetative and it's not working for this band. I don't care for the topics they sing about or the way they write their lyrics. This doesn't move me. They have no real energy. It sounds like they worship every pop-punk band out there and just formed a band to sound like all the bands they worshiped. Just like their name says, they're no good. - Tina "girlfriend" Tiongson

ACE TROUBLESHOOTER - *The Madness of the Crowds*
These guys have good vocals but they need to quiet down their instruments so that you can hear them. The best songs are the ones where the music isn't so loud. And there's too much drumming. - Maggie "sister" Lyons

Now, what did we learn? Well, I learned that my "non-punk" friends and family are a bunch of lazy-asses who have to be asked upwards of seven hundred times to type one lousy four sentence music review. But aside from that I learned that the general "non-punk" populace hates our music. It "sucks, it's "wussy" and it's "repetitive." Is this true? Perhaps. Maybe it's better then that our music is underground. Maybe it's better that we hide it from the normals. Maybe we should...hey! Maybe it's not our problem! Maybe it's just that their small conformist minds can't handle our outrageous, rebellious music! Yeah! That's it! They just want to stifle our spirits! Suppress our rage! Piddle in our Cokes! Well I say nuts to them! You think you're so tough mainstream America? You think you can keep us down? Well, I point the finger back at you. Dig this review of a "mainstream" cd that I recently found and watch me stick it to whitey:

THE ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND - *Reach For the Sky*
This CD is poop - Oliver Lyons

Take that mainstream America! I'll be pogoing while you're out buying Japanese cars. 100 punks rule! (Actually, one hundred punks would probably spend most of their time smoking pot and buying hair gel. Ruling would be pretty low on their list.)

Until next time, Kisses,

Oliver

greg matherly

The Haircut

I've been away from East Tennessee for about 7 years now. By "away" I mean not living there. No one can ever get "away" in the full sense of the word. We used to call it the great magnet. No matter where you moved off to, you somehow always ended up back in Bristol. It is true, there have been those that have ventured further than me, but when I call to speak with them today, I dial 423—the East Tennessee area code.

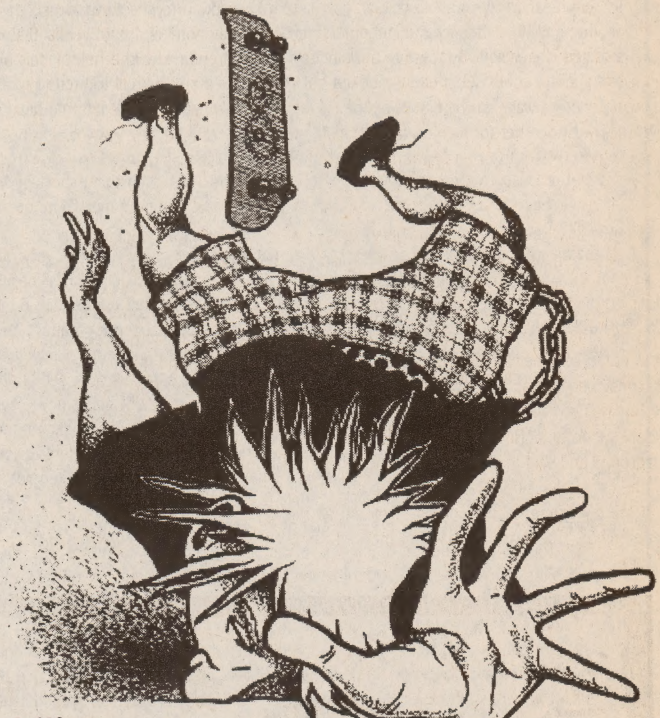
I recently made it up north. I've been living in New York since last May and the transition has been easier than I had imagined. Of course it is partially due to the fact that I chose to live on Staten Island, or as some Manhattanites refer to it—down in the country.

The best thing about living in New York, other than the pizza, of course, is the *Beer For Cigarettes Exchange Program.* I've peeled tens of thousands of labels off of beer bottles back in Tennessee. I'm not sure if this game of redneck roulette translates up north, so I'll explain: if one peels off a beer bottle label intact, it is akin to casting a 7 or 11 on the drunken die of getting lucky. I can tell you that cleaning up after a party in East Tennessee renders more beer labels than it does dirty sheets, yet the game is still respected and revered. But in all my nights of drunken, peeling prayers, I never once read the vertical footnote that states: NY 5-cents cash refund. Holy shit! Here is the safe bet. No more guess work. No more wondering if "she" knows the rules. This game is honored by man, woman and machine, alike. *Beer for cigarettes!* If I drink 4 cases of beer, I can trade them in on a whole pack of cigarettes. So, for every 4.8 beers I drink, I can smoke one cigarette for free. I love NY! I've been wanting to decrease my smoking anyway and now I have incentive. I now drink much more.

Some old friends were getting married, so I found myself heading back down south. Being a professional jobseeker, by trade, my occupation holds few amenities and its financial budget this particular fiscal year didn't permit superfluous spending. You know how the market is these days. With the approaching new year, however, I found that if the current trend in domestic stability held up, there would be enough funding to allot for a haircut under one condition: It be no more than 8 dollars, tip included. I hastily consulted my job holding partner and we came to the decision that I would save money by getting a haircut where it's really cheap—Tennessee. In hindsight, I didn't put much thought into this decision. It was obviously based on an adolescent formula of economics. Not once did I stop to think about the quality of hairdos floating around the average hillbilly head. Some things, it is widely agreed, you should just spend the extra buck on. Coffee, for instance. And cigarettes. Vanilla wafers. It's okay to drink cheap beer if you know what you're doing, but verily I say unto thee, woe unto those who try to save money by investing in cheap drugs. On the latter, always keep in mind that your dark night of the soul, an occasional necessity, could turn into psychosis. And that's almost as bad as a cheap haircut.

Now, living in East Tennessee develops in one a languid acceptance of things unattainable. There is a Zen-like ease to the endeavor of bounding around hill and dale in earnest nothingness; unless, of course, you are trying to escape. In which case, it becomes no large circle of hell. But as an outside observer — a visitor — being a part of East Tennessee is a rigorous experiment in banality and should only be attempted by the strong of will. It takes about 4 hours to wade through the eddies of pleasant nostalgia; to take in the breathtaking backbone of the southern Appalachians; to seal oneself back in to the patient, Mason jar of culture—then suddenly, you're left there exposed to *it.* Emerson's bastard eyeball, propped up on blocks and gawking at you from beyond the primer-gray cracks of Sullivan county's sheltering sky—sponsored by Wal-Mart and NASCAR.

I promised myself, and my girl, that I would return with a haircut. I'm always good at promising to bring back less than I take, so despite my flawed judgment on the situation, the day after the wedding, I drove to the mall for my haircut. The studio was busier than I had anticipated, which was a blessing because I found that I couldn't describe what I wanted my head to look like. I needed visual aid. Brenda took my name and motioned me to the waiting area where I found stacks of magazines and fashion books. What did I want? I wanted something new. I wanted something old. I wanted to be the Velvet Underground. I wanted to be Pierce Brosnan. I wanted sloppy and neat at the same time. I wanted a post-punk, post-avante garde, half-mod, half-rocker, flapper-era, beatnik, 60's influenced, streetwise, yet intellectual, worker's revolutionary retro-millennium meta-narrative that would please my girlfriend *and* my mother. So I began to look through the magazines for the picture. After 15 minutes of scanning Entertainment Weekly, People, Southern Living, and Harper's Bizarre, all I found was a good recipe for roasted garlic. Thinking that Brenda might call the cops if I showed her a recipe, I abandoned the picture of the split and tousled, aggressively seared cloves. I glanced around the room. 3 Seats over, a girl was flipping through a Rolling Stone. I thought this would be the best I could do given the circumstance. She shifted and the cover revealed Bob Dylan. No! Surely I'm doomed, I thought. I saw that Brenda was finishing up with her customer and I nervously began sorting through the fashion books. The only one I found devoted to men's hair styles had the word "Fag" written on it in cursive, permanent marker. "Greg," I heard Brenda announce. Fuck! Well, this is it, I think to myself. I walked over and sat down in the chair. I looked into the wall mirror and surveyed my executioner. God, her hair was awful. Cropped on the sides, straight and long in the back with a bouffant right above her cake-like forehead. As she attached the vinyl apron, she performed one of the many southern obligations of hospitality. She introduced me to her cousin, Amy, who was sitting in the chair next to mine wearing a Ryan's Cafeteria uniform and peeling back the paper wrapper of a Burger King Cheeseburger. Amy and she were in debate over someone, somewhere, who did something and for a few moments, I felt like I was intruding. Brenda finally asked me what I wanted and I told her I wasn't really sure, while pointing out what I definitely didn't want. I expected more questions, but she nodded her head and started spraying, combing and cutting. I fell prey to that mildly ecstatic limbo brought on by a stranger's touch on my head. Combing, pulling, cutting, my eyes closed and my scalp buzzing, I forgot all about my hopes and expectations, and I just listened to my homegrown Delilah.



Joel Menter

Brenda was probing Amy about the events of the previous weekend. "Did they ever find out what happened to Terry's Camaro? Was he just drunk?" Brenda inquired. Talking through a char-broiled mash of toasted buns, Amy exclaimed, "God, would you look at all the mustard they put on here." Brenda stopped cutting my hair and said, "For heaven's sake. Now you know they don't need to do all that." With the smell of greasy cheeseburgers, I returned to my senses and decided it best to pay close attention to the matter at hand. I glanced over as Amy was proffering up her splayed, dripping discs—the mustard wholly unrecognizable from the cheese save for the latter's ability to maintain a collection of caldera-like fingerprints. Amy wiped her bottom bun on the paper wrapper and reassembled her burger. "Roy stole it," she said. "Uh! Roy stole Terry's Camaro? What on earth for?" Brenda looked at me through the mirror with a look of giddy shock. "Terry broke his nose last weekend down'ta house." "Oh that's smart. Get your nose broken and steal a car," Brenda said, "Why'd Terry break his nose for?" "Well, Roy was drunk and talkin' like he still loved Tammy. He's told Brent he always loved her and always will, and you know Terry, he don't even like to think that Roy and Tammy was together." I looked at both of them with a blank expression in a quietly suggestive attempt to remind Brenda why she held a pair of scissors and a comb. Brenda just looked back at me as if she had all the time in the world and this was just the first of all the issues that the three of us needed to discuss. "They was together for nigh on ta' 10 year," she said. "Yea, but Terry says that don't give him no right to talk about it now. Right before his nose was broke, Terry said that Roy said that Tammy was one in a million."

Brenda finally made it around to finishing my hair, but it wasn't without incident. I had a mullet when Amy started on her 3rd and final cheeseburger, a mushroom cut when Brenda's uncle put his pit-bull to sleep, and I was coming dangerously close to looking like the tough-guy from 'N Sync when I interjected and steered the conversation to New York. The entire event lasted about an hour and a half. Surprisingly, I walked out with a reasonable haircut. I tipped Brenda outside of my budget and hit the street. I was consumed with an overpowering thought. I had a monomania for Roy. Roy was in love. Roy was so in love that he got his nose busted and stole a car. If that's not love what are we to do? Roy is a royal fighter. In the face of dire circumstance, he stood his ground and said that his love was one in a million. We should all love like Roy—inviting the fist of opposition and equipped to retaliate. . . by stealing the Camero of Love. Shit, I tell my girlfriend she's one in a million all the time, but in New York it's more of a warning: "There are at least 7 ½ more of you out there so you better watch your step, girl!"

I made it back to New York with my new top and my sanity, not that that is a commodity here. The first thing I had to do was to go get a slice. I ran into my neighbor, Marie, and she walked with me over to the pizza joint. On the way there she says to me, "You're hair looks good. Where'd you get it done?" I saved her the details and just said, "back home." "You know, I am so happy," she says, "I was in Manhattan yesterday and I've been wanting one of these paper towel holders, you know, that are made out of wood and stand up. Well I find this place that has them and I say, what-the-fuck, huh? I'm gonna buy it. And do you know when I got to the bus stop I see my Joey there holding the same paper towel holder made out of wood that stands up. Go figure. You know, I guess that's love." I thought about telling Marie about Roy, but I figure one person's stolen car is another person's paper-towel holder. Marie has a good man and she is happy. I'm not sure what Tammy's deal is but I don't think she'll find a more dedicated man than Roy south of the Mason-Dixon line. I said goodbye to Marie and headed in for a slice. As I was standing in line, a guy comes running in and darts behind the counter.

"Tony," He yells at the cook, "Yo, I fucked up with my girl. I need to make a pie." Tony stops what he's doing and says, "Whaddyoo do this time, huh?" "I just fucked up—but *real* bad. When I go over thair I need to have some flowuhs and a pie." "Ahh Jeez," says Tony, wiping a handful of sauce on his apron. "When you gonna lun. I sweauh, you an your brotha both." Then suddenly, in a moment of profound clarity, standing their looking like a slaughterhouse packer who just saw a few pigs fly out of the front door, he says, "I know Petey, you should make it the shape of a heart. Yea, the shape of a heart—loaded with extra sawsage." Petey lets out an ecstatic squeak and runs to the cooler for the dough.

Love is sweet—but I guess it's also spicy and encased in pig intestines. And lest we should ever forget, love is a felony *and* dueling paper towel holders. I looked at the clock on the wall and realized that *my* baby should be on the ferry home from work. Christ, I haven't seen her in almost two weeks. I hope she likes my new haircut. I step up to the counter and ask Tony if he can make me one of those heart-shaped pizzas—loaded with extra onions. . . and fresh garlic.

Roger Miret and the
DisasterS

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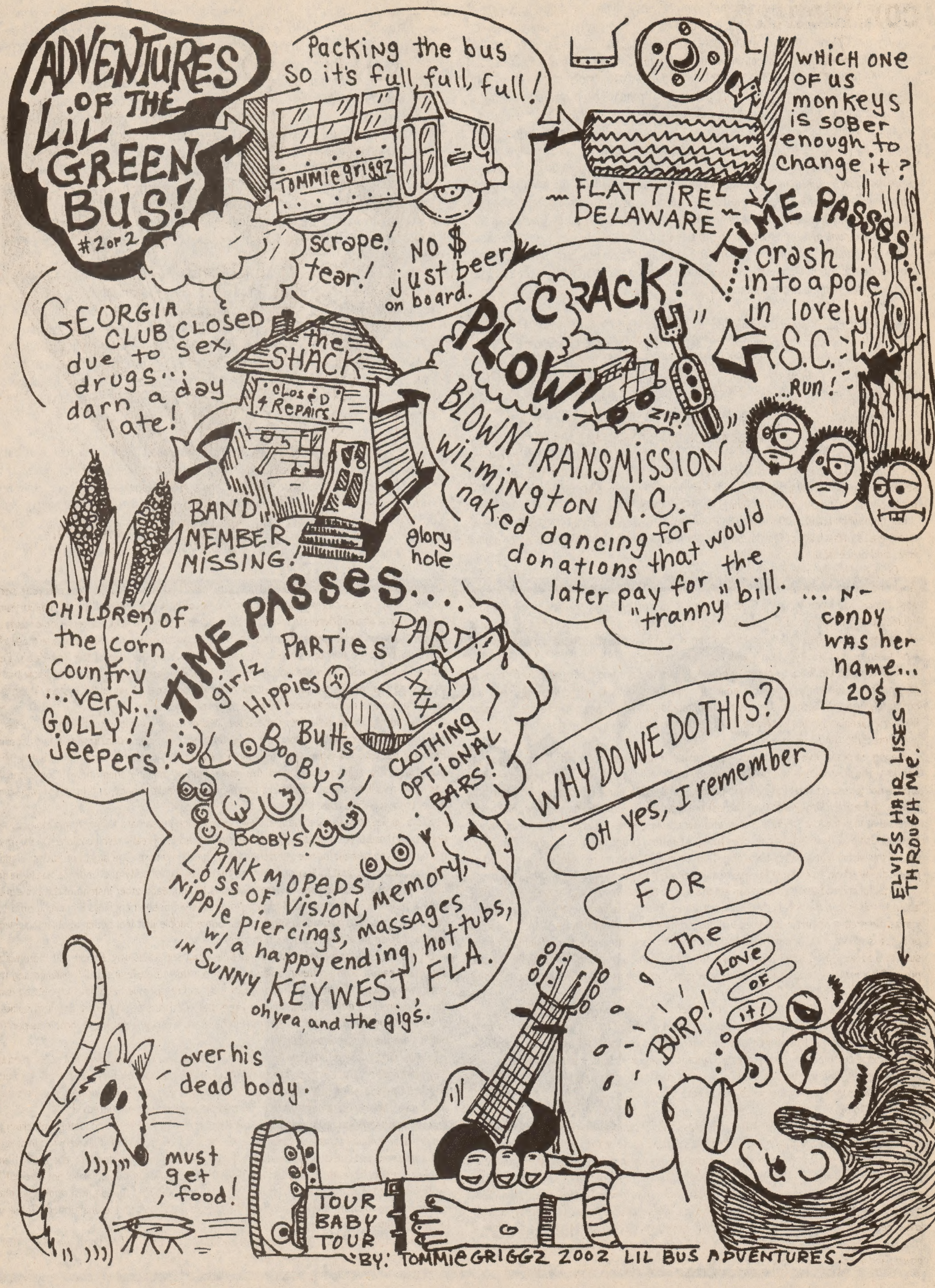
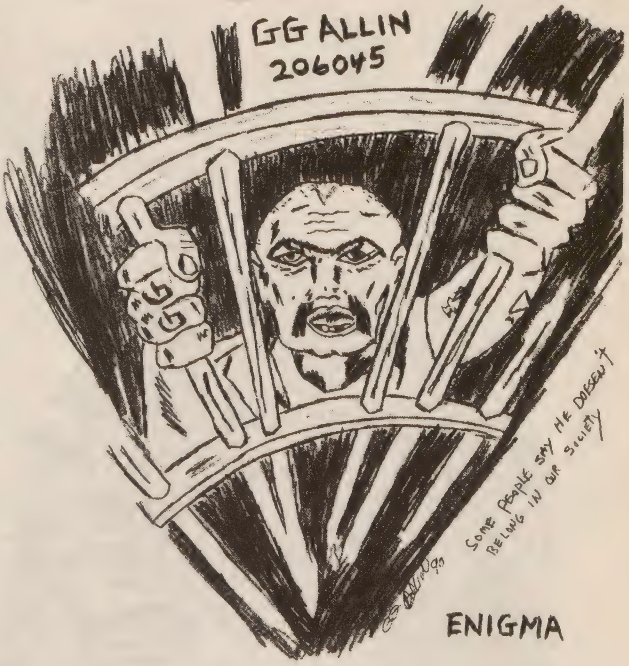

ADVENTURES OF THE LIL GREEN BUS!
#2 or 2
Packing the bus so it's full, full, full!
TOMMie griggz
scrape! tear!
NO $ just beer on board.
FLAT TIRE DELAWARE
WHICH ONE OF US monkeys is sober enough to change it?
TIME PASSES....
crash into a pole in lovely S.C.
...RUN!
CRACK!
PLOW!
ZIP!
BLOWN TRANSMISSION WILMINGTON N.C.
naked dancing for donations that would later pay for the "tranny" bill.
...N- condy was her name... 20$
GEORGIA CLUB CLOSED due to sex, drugs... darn a day late!
the SHACK
CLOSED 4 REPAIRS
BAND MEMBER MISSING!
glory hole
CHILDREN of the corn Country ...vern... GOLLY!! jeepers!
TIME PASSES....
girlz
PARTIES
PARTY
Hippies
XXX
Butts
BOOBYS!
BOOBYS!
CLOTHING OPTIONAL BARS!
PINK MOPEDS LOSS OF VISION, memory, Nipple piercings, massages w/ a happy ending, hot tubs, IN SUNNY KEYWEST, FLA.
oh yea, and the gigs.
WHY DO WE DO THIS?
oH yes, I remember
FOR
The
LOVE
OF
it!
BURP!
ELVISS HAIR LIVES THROUGH ME!
over his dead body.
must get, food!
TOUR BABY TOUR
BY: TOMMIEGRIGGZ 2002 LIL BUS ADVENTURES.

commentary

A letter from prison

Jersey Beat has always maintained a policy - as many punk zines do- of sending fanzines for free to prisoners. Sometimes the prisoners write back. Sometimes they even get out of jail and go on to become friends. For instance, Jersey Beat published writings by G.G. Allin (like the drawing on this page) done while he was in federal prison. The late Robert Martin, AKA Donny The Punk, was one of the most fascinating human beings I've ever known, a pivotal figure in the NYC punk scene of the mid-Eighties, and we first got to know each other by trading letters when he was in prison. In that spirit, and in Donny's memory, I continue to correspond with prisoners, and that is why I am publishing this essay sent to me by a prisoner and punk rocker from Michigan . - Jim Testa.


GG ALLIN
206045
SOME PEOPLE SAY HE DOESN'T BELONG IN OUR SOCIETY
ENIGMA

By Brian Smith

Can one be punk anywhere?

I mean in almost any city you go to you can find someone to share your "alternative" beliefs with. Sometimes it'll be some person into the Ramones, or other times someone with the understanding of expression through music. Sure, not every town has these people, but almost any state you go to, within their larger cities, you will find punks. Whether hidden in small clubs, bars, record stores, or squats they are there and are ready to accept others and inform the uninformed.

This is only speaking about the United States. But you see, one could turn back the pages of time to the wartimes of East versus West Germany, where the combination of government and corporate oppression was nearly at its highest, and what would you see? You'd see the organization of people, many including punks, and anarchists. So what does this say? Well, it seems to say that even in the worst of times, punks can unite and stand together for one better purpose. The purpose we all stand for, FREEDOM.

But then what about punks in prison? I've established the unity and ability to be punk elsewhere, so what about punks in prison? What about the struggle to maintain one's punk views and beliefs while incarcerated?

Okay, first lets figure out what it is to be punk. I'll go with this: Jim Testa, (of Jersey Beat, zine) once wrote to me in a letter, "To me, punk isn't your haircut, or your clothes or even what bands you listen to; it's a state of mind. It means believing that it's better to do it yourself that letting some big corporation do things for you. It means standing up for what you believe, even when you seem to disagree with almost everybody else around you." I'd have to agree with Jim; if that isn't punk I don't know what is.

So with that done, back to punks in prison. I have to say I find it very hard to be punk in prison. There's an endless struggle against racism and hate. It seems like my beliefs are constantly being challenged. Sure, by the understanding that punk is a mind-state, it cannot simply be taken away; but like a wall it can be broken away.

Let me try to site some examples.

Among all punks I've ever known, homosexuality has been accepted. It's an aspect of freedom. The right to love and be with anybody that's willing to be with you. I've never known a punk not to respect that. But being in prison, I deal with a whole different aspect of that. In prison, there are a large number of homosexual predators. Men who try to force and coerce others that they think are gullible, naive, and vulnerable into sexual acts. These predators will fein friendship to their victims and offer them cigarettes, coffee, food, and drugs. Then they will tell this victim that he owes them sex. Often times, if the victim refuses, they are raped or physically attacked. This all just for exercising their right to say "No".

It's pitiful and sad that that man can act this way to his fellow man. But actually, if you think about it, this is also the way our government works. The U.S. government always has a plan, just as the predator plans to have sex with his victim. If the "powers that be" want a proposal or bill passed that will ultimately earn them money and serve the large corporations, they are sure to add something small to pacify us, the "little man," and make him think he still has power. Also like the victim, as soon as the little man goes against the power he is punished or abused.

So my point is, much as the acts of the government influence us to hate and dislike all forms of governing, the homosexual predators make it difficult for me not to dislike or hate gays. It makes me sick to see men or women forced into anything, let alone sexual acts. To see someone being beaten up or taken advantage of is just as bad. It is so hard not to hate the people that do these type things. I'm sure it's hard to understand what I'm saying, but these problems in prison almost force one to hate and abhor.

Allow me to explain further.

In the large population of prison, I've ran across a lot of people who claim to be anarchists. Now I have no problem with anarchists; actually, I share some of their beliefs. These people that I'm speaking of though are not for anarchy. I suppose that they do not understand the beliefs. What I mean is these same men that claim to be anarchists are getting Nazi propaganda tattoo'd on themselves and preaching "white power". These men claim allegiance to such racist groups as the Aryan Nation. These people speak of anarchy, which I know means total and absolute freedom without governing forces, yet they want to institute a Nazi like government of white male domination. A government that is against gays, women of power, and anyone not of European descent. A government very much like our own current form of governing, yet diabolically worse. It's total madness. And to see everyday people claiming anarchy but putting such a infernal twist on it is just terrible. But as a white punk, I suffer this in a whole different way also. It's nearly futile for me to seek conversation or unity with others that claim to be punks or anarchists because so many are not. Also because those of us that truly are punk are looked upon as racists, quite a bit because of the Neo-Nazi's. Being labeled just because I'm white and have a mohawk is nonsense. It hurts me to know that I'm associated this way by people that know nothing about me or my belief system. I just don't understand man's nature to hate, degrade, and fight.

This racism though is far from one-sided. It isn't just the white guys hating the blacks. It's also, in much larger numbers, blacks hating the whites. I have a hard time with this especially. Probably because I'm white. Anyways, almost everyday I overhear some conversation where black guys are talking about how the white man is holding them down. Sometimes the conversation will be about how blacks can play sports, make money, and have sex with women better than any white man.

It's a no win situation that happens everyday, making it so hard for me to maintain my punk beliefs, and harder yet to fight my inner war against racism. I really wish I could just wake up one morning to see no hate in here, or better yet no hate anywhere. One day of no racism, fighting, robbery, and rape. Just to live one day like that, one day of unity and kindness would be total bliss. The problem is everyone in here continues to fight each other instead of the powers that hold us here and oppress us all. Too many of these men obtain happiness by hurting others, by degrading gays, and degrading other races. Some people just feel better about themselves if they hurt or degrade others. It's hard to fathom.

On the free side of the fence though, people don't see it this way. People out there will talk about how easy it is to not be anti-gay or racist but these people are sadly mistaken and have no idea how big and influential the problem truly is. Free people have not experienced what I have. Prison life is horrible, but still not even that word can begin to describe it; it is like no other. The things and "sickness" that exist in here are unimaginable. These problems don't die out, it's like they fester and multiply.

People living in places like New York, Miami, Los Angeles, and Seattle are not confronted with the racist fighting and killing or forced homosexuality and rape everyday. But I am. No matter who you are and no matter where you are, in prison you see it in countless numbers every single day. There is not a day of peace; instead I'm confronted with hatred.

Every morning I wake fighting against the impulse to hate, destroy, and loathe. I'm telling you it is not easy to fight racism and these other forms and faces of hatred. It's a very tough struggle that sometimes feels next to impossible to overcome. But it can be done, so every day I hope that I and others have the will to fight this disease of the mind and society. I will not give up!

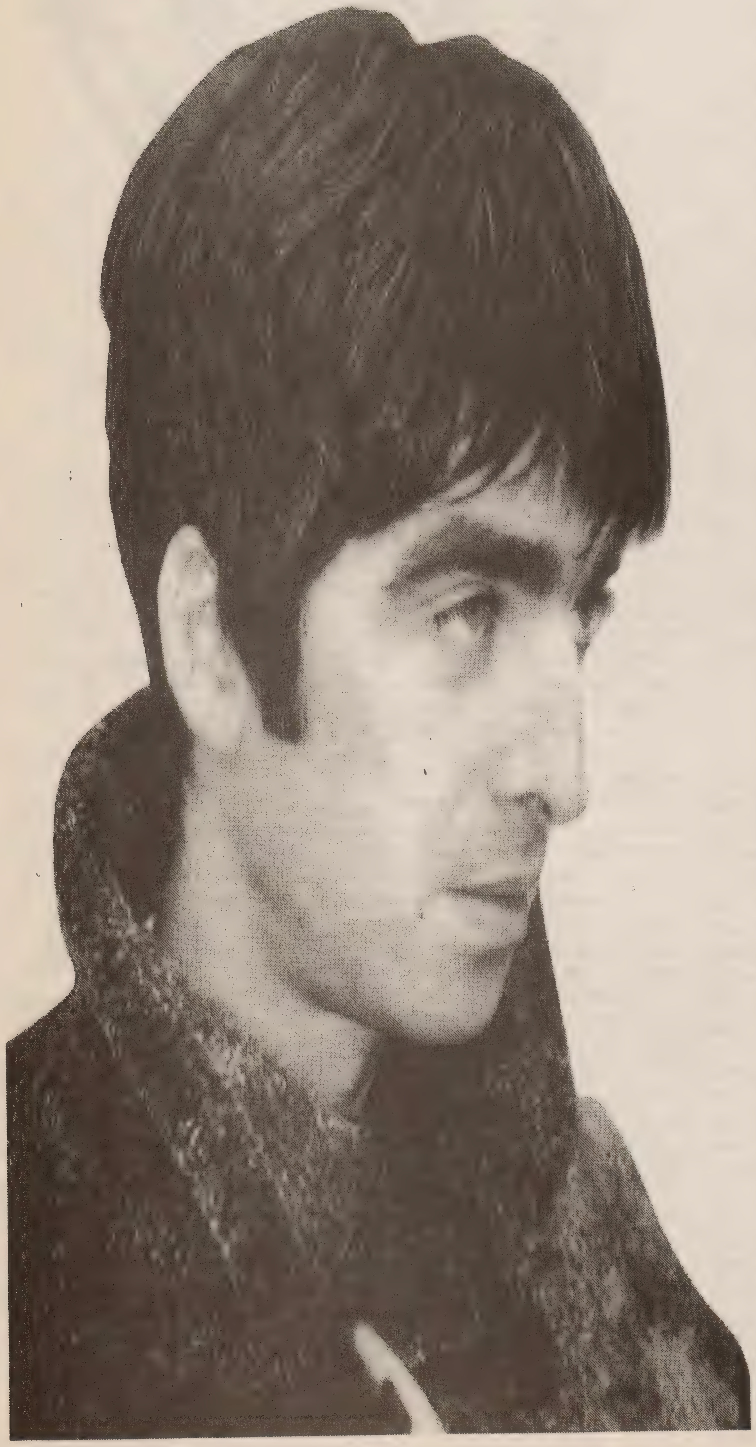
The knowledge of this problem is what I m offering. Take it if you wish. Just remember, there is always room to know, and why not take the time to grow. Inform the uninformed. Thank you for reading this.

You can contact me at: Brian Smith #286857, Muskegon Correctional Facility, 2400 5. Sheridan Rd. , Muskegon, MI 49442-6298

BRITISH BEAT

BY TRIS McCALL

Britain's Loss of World Hegemony, Vol. 258



OASIS - *Heathen Chemistry* (Sony)

When did the sun begin to set on the old Britpop Empire? Was it 1997, when perennial also-rans like Echobelly and the Boo Radleys started to have difficulty getting stateside releases? Or was it earlier still? If *What's The Story (Morning Glory)* was an apotheosis, a commercial and cultural high-water mark for the genre, it was also an indisputable victory in a feud between factions – big sound and big sentiment trumped those groups who, taking their cues from Blur's *Modern Life Is Rubbish* and *Parklife*, preferred smaller-sounding, tightly-crafted presentations suggesting the Kinks and Syd Barrett as much as The Who and The Beatles. Never mind that Noel Gallagher was, upon close inspection, a master of the kind of particular scenario-writing that Blur generally gets credited for – the popular perception of Oasis as grandiose universalists (and laddists) encouraged other groups to soften their edges, crank up the midrange, and turn their backs on traditional English irony and story-art in favor of huge, painfully sincere bitter-sweet symphonies. By 1998, three years after the coronation of Oasis and *What's The Story (Morning Glory)*, Gallagher's epigones had run rampant, and what passed for Britpop was essentially indistinguishable from American folk-rock like Matchbox 20 or Third Eye Blind. And Americans, great patriots that we are, will always prefer to buy domestic.

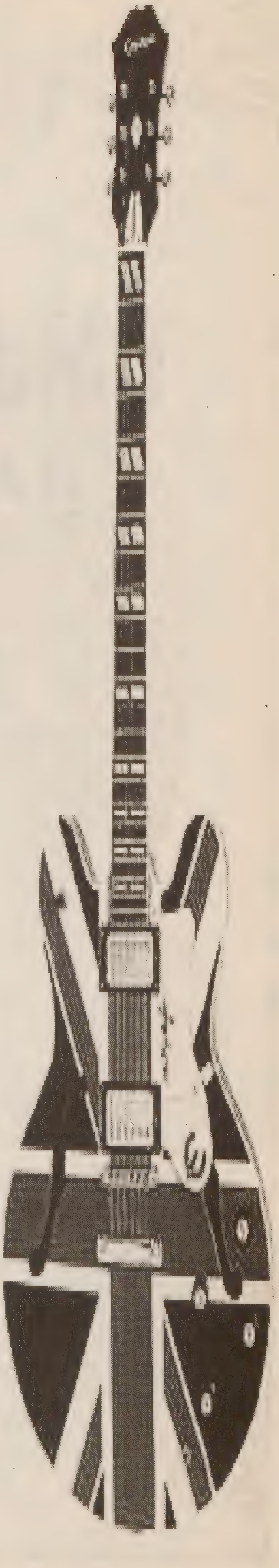
These days, Noel Gallagher is just another guitar rocker with an impressive resume struggling for elbow room on American airwaves. But then, allagher is no ordinary songwriter, and there are still many for whom the world stops at the release of a new Oasis album. When we last heard from him (unmediated by the Chemical Brothers), he'd tried to sneak the underdone *Standing On The Shoulder Of Giants* by us on the strength of a decent but all-too-familiar single. Those of us who weren't hypnotized by the guitar loops and mellotrons understood it for what it was – a holding-pattern album riven with rehashes and rhyming couplets dopey enough to justify his completely undeserved reputation as an indifferent lyricist. Most of the original group had deserted him by that point, and while he still had his younger brother's indelible voice as a resource, he showed himself willing to waste it, singing far too many of the tracks himself. Worse yet, he allowed Liam to write and present a song – the execrable and interminable "Little James," still, for my money, the single worst recording in the history of Britpop.

Stung by criticism that Oasis had degenerated into an undisciplined version of the Noel & Liam Show, the Gallaghers recruited Andy Bell (the talented Ride sideman, alas; not the synthpop hero of Erasure) and the protean Gem Archer, toured, toured some more, deposited themselves in the studio, and attempted to smelt their massive egos into a tight and single-minded unit. See, Oasis fan, it says so right there on the back of your new CD – look at the credits, and you'll see that *Heathen Chemistry* (****, Epic) was produced by The Band. Presumably this does not mean Rick Danko and Robbie Robertson were involved, but instead it suggests something that heretofore nobody had suspected about Oasis – since most assumed that the "group" was little more than a vehicle for Noel's trad-rock ideology and Liam's alternately snotty and heartrending performances.

So no matter what your previous opinion of Andy Bell and Gem Archer, you'd be well within your rights to be skeptical about this new, democratic Oasis, an Oasis that allowed only six of the songs on *Heathen Chemistry* to be Noel Gallagher originals. Of the other five (yes, I'm intentionally omitting the "bonus" instrumental, a you-had-to-be-there jam session if ever I've heard one), one is by Bell, one by Archer, and - run for the hills! - a daunting three were written by Liam Gallagher. To spread the wealth and responsibility further, Noel Gallagher now sings more than ever, taking the lead on two lengthy and important tracks, hogging the chorus of the album's undeniable centerpiece, and interjecting his old-man-of-the-woods backups wherever he can shoehorn them into the massive mixes. Andy Bell's voice (or is that Archer's?) also gets a nifty foreground spot or two, and Liam gamely plows his way through Archer's clumsy verses. Has Oasis really been transformed into a collective, a big, happy, mutually supportive family? Has the old coot finally relinquished the steering wheel?

(Continued on next page)

Well, no. Bell's contribution turns out to be a minute-long, vaguely Floydish instrumental, little more than a brather between two of the elder Gallagher's colossi. Gem Archer's "Hung In A Bad Place" will either be received as a breath of fresh air or completely atavistic, depending on whether or not you think that recreating the sound and feel of the more raucous tracks on *Definitely Maybe* is the way for Oasis to go. (I don't.) But it is in any case an unimportant song bearing the burden of an awkward lyric. The three Liam Gallagher originals turn out to be neither disasters nor triumphs – the most forgettable, "A Better Man," closes the album with a fizzle, but is serviceable enough as a smooth landing, and does contain a nifty guitar hook. The other two are surprisingly solid, particularly the brief "Songbird," which shares more than a title with Fleetwood Mac and allows the kid brother to indulge his semi-secret treacly side; it's fluff, but fun fluff. Liam's slow epic "Born On A Different Cloud" serves as the album's effective closer, but it essentially begins the zone-out portion of the listening experience – you could spin Heathen Chemistry twenty times before you really accessed the two last tracks. This sequencing has been carefully designed to highlight Noel Gallagher's contributions, and the other members of The Band have written songs that serve not as filler, but as frames.



In or out of context, the six Noel Gallagher songs are great. Not immediate-great like *Definitely Maybe* or the finest parts of *The Masterplan*, not visionary-great like *What's The Story (Morning Glory)*, not conceptually-great like the misunderstood *Be Here Now*, but still undeniably great, great with the mature assurance of the works of an articulate, proven songwriter in full blossom, miles beyond anything on Standing On The Shoulder Of Giants. Perhaps the lesson of Shoulder was that Gallagher ought never to force himself – here's a writer who is at his best when addressing a specific problem or scenario, and hey, he simply might not have had any more than six of those in his dresser drawer this time out. When he does have something direct to sing about, he has always attacked the problem with a precise, economical address, heavy on memorable lines and couplets, and with nary a word wasted. Several of these new songs repeat verses, and many critics claim this as hanging evidence of Gallagher's laziness – get in there and write a second verse, you mook! But that's to deny him his subtlety, and to ignore his accompanying penchant for slightly but meaningfully altering the choruses of those same songs as they proceed. It's an experimental trick, not a lazy one, and the seamlessness with which Gallagher disguises his experimentalism within the strict format of radio-friendly pop-rock songs has always been testament to his artistry.

"The Hindu Times" opens the album with a superpsychedelic riff, a verse melody borrowed from "All Right Now," and the sort of rafter-shaking chorus that has made Oasis world-famous. Liam's performance, as always, redeems his brother's manic urgency and recasts it as chummy ambition – his read on the line "I can't sleep 'coz the world won't wait" sounds neither desperate nor coke-wired, but, rather, charged with infectious and optimistic energy. Noel takes the lead on "Force Of Nature," and inverts his brother's goodwill – it's a break-up song, and Gallagher, who had on previous albums played the generous if rakish cad, delivers a broadside that's unprecedented in its viciousness: "You look like a faded picture/I see the cracks freezing on your skin" is a wicked sentiment for the redemptive author of "The Girl With The Dirty Shirt" to express (and perhaps even to the same girl!). Gallagher stomps his way petulantly through the choruses, mixing outrage, threats, and insults with prophetic suggestions of doom, spitting out the lyrics with venom and cold immediacy. The whole thing's a hoot, and it's about as incendiary a kiss-off as you could ever want. "Stop Crying Your Heart Out," the American single, flips the script and approaches the end of a relationship with hard-faced resignation, if not sympathy. "All of the stars/have faded away/just try not to worry," sings Liam, only later to revise it, with chilling effect, to "we're all of us stars/we're fading away."

The stars fade again on "Little By Little," a mid-tempo rocker that begins with organ swells and a declaration of embattlement and ends amid a squall of guitar and a manifest existential crisis. In between lay three and a half minutes of some of the most perfect AOR ever committed to tape, simultaneously stately and exciting, enough to remind everybody from Richard Ashcroft to the Goo Goo Dolls to Radiohead who's boss when it comes to The Big Music. Noel Gallagher's lead vocal on the chorus is wholly convincing and impassioned; here, as elsewhere on Heathen Chemistry, the elder brother at last proves himself a worthy frontman (though, to be fair, still not half as good as Liam). The distance he's travelled since "Talk Tonight" and other *Definitely Maybe* B-sides is almost inestimable. "(Probably) All In The Mind" finds the brothers singing close harmony over Noel's eightieth iteration of "Tomorrow Never Knows"; unsurprisingly, it works yet again.

Gallagher closes his contribution to *Heathen Chemistry* with "She Is Love," an old-fashioned country hardball of a number, pastoral and hand-clapping, with a catchy melody, strummed acoustic guitars, sweet flutes on the mellotron, and a big singalong chorus. Though the subject is love rediscovered, and though it's placed at the end of the album to ameliorate the caustic effects of some of the previous pessimism, Noel's performance communicates an unmistakable and even somewhat noble weariness, love of a second order, cooler after a rainstorm. Previous Oasis albums have been so relentlessly upbeat and high-Romantic – and The Band has been so consistent that (unlike many of their American counterparts) they're not in this to depress people or to reinforce or applaud anyone's misery – that Gallagher no doubt surprised himself with the depths of the vitriol he needed to spew this time around. Oasis probably saw "She Is Love" as a good compensating measure, but, hey, they don't have to apologize to me. They caught a few bad breaks, the group essentially split up and needed to be reconstituted, the style of music they do isn't too popular anymore, they're never going to be all that big in the States, Paul McCartney dissed them, their marriages broke up messily in the British tabloids, New Labour turned out to look more or less the same as the Old Tories, Manchester United keeps on winning. Let them vent, it's okay, they've earned a gripe or two. Better an unedited document of disappointment and frustration like Heathen Chemistry than a please-everybody half-measure like *Standing On The Shoulder Of Giants.*

One last thing, and then I'm off to spin the new Gomez record for the zillionth time. Ever since 1997, when *Be Here Now* mildly disappointed the faithful, there have been suggestions in both the British and American press that Oasis was poised to radically overhaul their sound by incorporating electronics. It would have been an easy step to take, and one that would, no doubt, have won them critical plaudits. Yet here they are, five years later, still riding the same concept, still mining the same classic-rock sources with impressive results, true to the original Britpop formula of traditional songcraft coupled with strong melody and broadly narrative lyrics. As for their contemporaries, Damon Albarn has reinvented himself as a cartoon shill for third-rate trip-hop. Ride, The London Suede, and Kula Shaker have dissolved. The Charlatans and Primal Scream seem content with their roles as proto-American funkmasters. Supergrass have stranded themselves in a netherland of sound, Louise Wener is writing books. Echobelly, Lush, Bond, and the Stone Roses are missing in action, Pulp is doing sea-shanties, Radiohead has lapsed into bloat and incomprehensibility, and God save us from whatever The Verve and Richard Ashcroft are currently doing. But Noel Gallagher soldiers on as if it's still 1994, and he continues to make music so compelling that its anachronisms barely even register for listeners. If, as an artist and craftsman, he was several strides ahead his peers eight years ago, by now he's lapped their asses three or four times.

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WE FESTIVAL/2002

Once more, with feeling

Mike Sheppard of Scott Farkus Affair, bringing down the house
Photos by D. Michael McNamara

Wilmington, No. Carolina — May 23-29, 2002

There's a lot about the Wilmington Exchange (or "W.E.") Festival that makes it unique. For on thing, it lasts a whole week. Secondly, it embodies the spirit of Do It Yourself more than anything even vaguely like it. There's no magazine or newspaper or radio station or record label behind it; it's put together and run every year by volunteers who don't get paid, and whose only motivation is bringing a bunch of cool bands down to Wilmington, North Carolina to play. Because there's no corporate agenda, there's no profit motive either; a pass for the entire week costs $15, making W.E. Fest affordable to just about anyone.

What's even more amazing is that those volunteers change from year to year; the last four W.E. Fests (this year was the 7th, by the way) owed their existence to complete different people.

And so every W.E. Fest seems to look and feel a little different from the last one. And just as importantly, every year the city of Wilmington changes a little more too. Seven years ago, Wilmington was still an undiscovered college-town with lots of rock clubs and a sizable population of twenty-something slacker types who listened to loud rock music in between trips to the beach. Then the place started to get gentrified. In 2002, Wilmington had more yuppies, fewer Bohemians, lots of trendy antique shoppes and boutiques filling its once-abandoned downtown, only *one* remaining rock club, and a municipal noise ordinance that made the all-night after-hours parties that were a staple of the early W.E. Fests unthinkable.

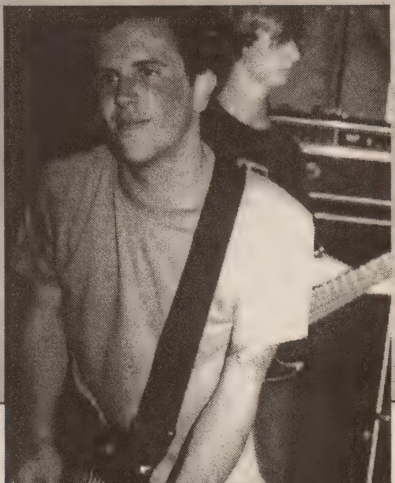
For the first time this year, every W.E. Fest event was held in the same venue – Bessie's, a rundown basement club with grotty bathrooms, cheap beer, a decent-sized stage, and a middle-aged soundman who performed nightly magic with the club's battered p.a., making everything from blaring speed-metal bands to acoustic singer-songwriters sound great. Bessie's reminds me a lot of the old Rat in Boston, and while it's smaller than the Rat used to be, it's still a lot bigger than almost any other W.E. Fest venue in the past. So while attendance this year was probably at least as good if not better than in previous years, the shows were held in a club that holds a couple of hundred people, not some ratty basement space or a sandwich shop that would barely hold 50. So it look and felt a lot emptier than usual, and that in turn seemed to ratchet down the intensity level a bit. This was a kinder, gentler, mellower W.E. Fest. With no late-nights, fans were less hyper, less manic, less sleep-deprived (although with nickel beers for an hour every night before showtime, no less drunk) than in years past.)

Still, it was W.E. Fest nonetheless. The Negatones, who are probably as jaded and cynical as any New York band you'll ever meet, drove all the way down to Wilmington, did their set, and came back the next day – and they had so much fun that they were on the phone almost immediately begging to come back next year. But shit, that's nothing. Smarty Pants, an altogether amazing post-punk party band from Oklahoma City, OK, drove all the way from Oklahoma and back just to play W.E. Fest (for the third time.) And then there were the bands from Upstate New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston who made the trek, and were ecstatic to do so. Not everyone who plays or attends a W.E. Fest comes back. Not everybody can. But they all pretty much want to. .

Obviously, something is happening here, and it's damn sure that no one in the music industry knows what is. Do you, Mr. Jones? So I'm going to explain it to you: You take a bunch of people who care passionately about music, and then you bring in a bunch of musicians who care passionately about making music, and magic happens. For one thing, there's nothing that will kick a band into higher gear than playing on the same bill with a bunch of other kickass bands. Or playing in front of an audience that's actually listening to, and then cheering, every song.

This year's W.E. Fest fell back into the capable hands of its founder, Kenyata Sullivan, a cherubic Wilmington native and, if I may say so, quite simply one of the sweetest human beings on the planet. He was ably assisted by another original W.E. Fester, Rich D'Anjoleil, as well as Kim and Jeremy from the band Pacer (and Eskimo Kiss Records.) Together, the managed to book seven nights of wonderfully eclectic and talented live music, arrange for 5-cent microbrew beer every night of the festival for an hour, several tables full of free fanzines, stickers, flyers, tapes, and CD's (the "exchange" part of the Wilmington Exchange Festival,) not to mention finding free housing for many of the attendees, bands and fans alike.

This year's festival featured almost a 50/50 mix of returning bands and first-timers. With so many familiar faces coming into town throughout the week (as well as quite a few veteran W.E. Festers who just seem to show up every year), going to W.E. Fest feels a bit like going back to the same summer camp over and over. Part of the fun is seeing old friends, part is making new friends, and then there's all that music…. Can you think of a better reason to spend Memorial Day Weekend in North Carolina?

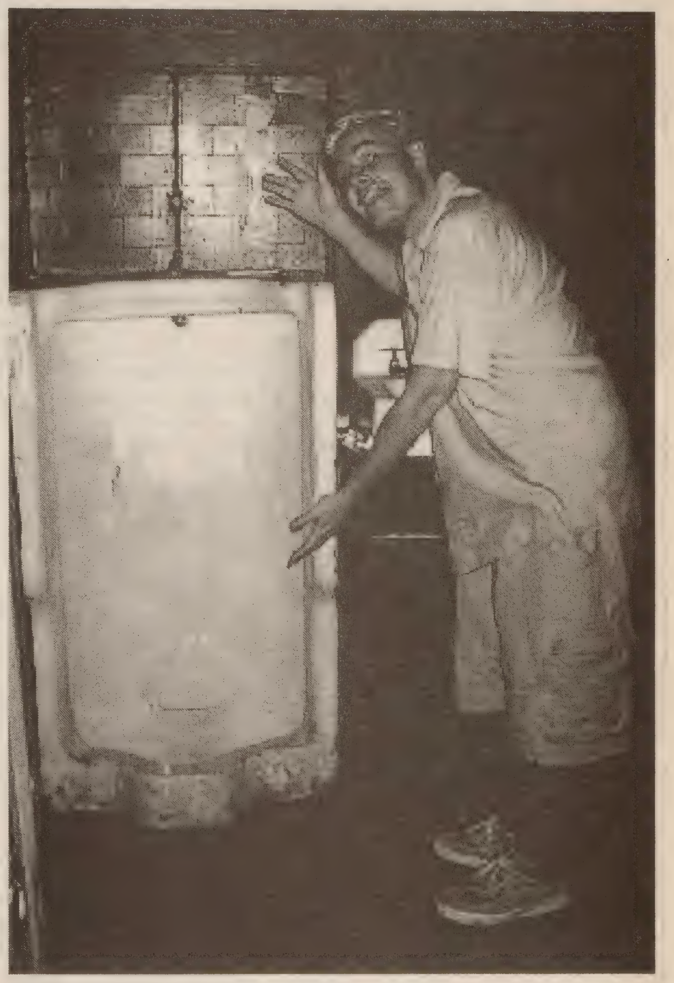


W.E. Fest Fun: Clockwise, from top left: NYCs Negatones totally rocked the house with their spastic geekcore post-punk. Syracuse's Worm Quartet turned out to be a hilarious one-man act with all his backing music on a Discman (and a serious mullet); NJ's Slow Wire proved that the Garden State is still the indie rock capitol of the universe; emo cuties Mae filled in at the last minute; the Clang Quartet was a one-man noise-core demolition derby. For more in-depth, day by day coverage of W.E. Fest 2002, visit www.jerseybeat.com

10 Thoughts on W.E. Fest 2002

by Johnny Puke

1. Wilmington, North Carolina is a very special town. Typical to the Carolinas, its people ('Festers as well as civilians) are fiercely independent, eccentric, and universally hospitable and genteel. It's interesting to note that the majority of W.E. Fest's organizers from the past no longer live in Wilmington, but each year have a compulsion to return, as we expect they always will.
2. The "liquor bar"connected to Bessie's (where we all found ourselves at one time or another,) is called Longstreet's. It's named after a Confederate general from South Carolina who tried to convince Robert E. Lee at Gettysburg that it might be a good idea to retreat. More Americans died in that battle than in the entire Vietnam War. I guess that makes Longstreet's kinda cool; the General was pretty wise, anyway, but it didn't do him much good. (Editor's Note: Longstreet's was named by actor Tom Berenger, its original owner, who played General Longstreet in a civil war film.) Anyway, they got the world's biggest urinal in the men's room. Really.
3. We all know Kenyata and Eskimo Kiss Records are indie rock saints with a megaton of good karma coming their way for the basically thankless chore of organizing this special event, which is so easy for the rest of us to take for granted. That's to say nothing of all the other volunteers whose contributions were even more thankless, as I don't even know their names. So... thanks, everyone.
4. Bessie's is a cool club. You have to know that when we're not there with our drinking from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. and our seven bands a night for W.E. Fest, bands like Derail play Bessie's all year long. They are salmon swimming upstream too, fighting the good fight in a continually gentrifying downtown area booming with yuppies. The new hip-hop club next door had at least one big fight or violent event every night over the three-night Memorial Day Weekend, all of which attracted multiple cop cars and an ambulance. (There wasn't a single untoward incident at Bessie's throughout all of W.E. Fest, by the way, even with nickel beers for a couple of hours every night. – Editor) On the upside, with foolishness like that going on next door, the last thing Wilmington's Finest were concerned about was the wide array of vice-ridden vagabonds that are W. E. Fest'ers. So thanks, violent rap dudes. No cops cared I was smoking pot in my van while you guys were stabbing each other. Thanks... I think.
5. "The new people who are working at Bessie's are dicks." I heard that line from several people during the Fest, and uttered it myself at times. One guy in particular who appeared to be fresh off the Navy base was at the very least inhospitable and at worst, a narrow-minded bigot who enjoyed bossing around us "weirdos." The first night a negative tone was set for me as Private Shorthair snatched a beer from my hand as I stood 10 feet from the back door in the load-in area. While that area may be off-limits for alcohol (didn't seem so in previous years,) some of the older staff would have just said, "Take it inside" as opposed to splashingly confiscating what was a $3.00 Miller Lite. (P.S. Always tip the bartenders well for good W.E. Fest karma. It worked for me, getting good parking spots every night! Thanks, Rich and Kristin!)
6. Not only are the new people at Bessie's rude, but they are at least confused and at worst, price gougers. On Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights, a Miller Lite was either $2 or $2.50 depending on which bartender you went to and what time of evening it was. And this had nothing to do with our W.E. Fest "Happy Hour" or the 5 cent beer thing. The bartenders even changed the prices on the chalkboard behind the bar seemingly at random.
7. Can't we get a blackboard or some neon light thing that can identify each band as they play? Although the program this year was top-notch, there is always a last-minute change or two and sometimes, a band that didn't make it into the program gets to play. This year, a great unannounced set was played by a Richmond band called Mae, but most people thought they were the band listed in the program.
8. "The Exchange" gets smaller and smaller each year. I hear that from a lot of vets too. From what I can tell, we need someone with a computer to harass lots more record labels and zines to get the assload of swag to Wilmington that the fold farts reminisce about. This is seemingly easily achieved; it just takes a little time and effort. Volunteers?



9. If we do get heaps of meaty swag for W.E. Fest '03, maybe someone could be in charge of doling out the "good" t-shirts, CD's etc each day so that someone arriving on Memorial Day (after the big weekend but with 3 more Fest days to go) could get as much out of the Exchange as the lucky folks who arrive on the first few days.
10. Finally... We need more cocaine at W.E. Fest. In fact, we need any cocaine at all at W.E. Fest. I heard that sentiment from musicians from Chicago, New Jersey, Upstate New York, as well as a blow-hungry Charleston contingent. Everyone agreed that in their respective towns, some late-night blow is most bar settings is easy to get and has benefits, including prolonged drinking and making it through a 6-band show several nights in a row. In a bar-heavy party town like Wilmington, there have to be low-level cocaine-dealing bar rats. I'm sure there was blow next door at the hip hop club, but no 'Fester had the nads to go try that. So people, help us out. We're writers, musicians, we need a little lift after six hours of drinking and listening to everything from the genius to the godawful. Some Wilmington W.E. Fester, PLEASE invite some local purveyors of energetic wares next year. I can guarantee that a national consortium of W.E. Fest'ers are prepared to offer $15.00 scholarships to insure these local entrepreneurs' attendance. We'll all thank you.

Jersey Beat and W.E. Fest would like to note that the opinions of Mr. Puke are his alone and do not reflect the opinions or policies of either this fanzine or the W.E. Festival.

By Phil Rainone, Stephen Rainone, & Tim Norek

warped tour 2002

Getting Warped In Camden

Tweeter Center, Camden, NJ - August 9, 2002

Getting to the Tweeter Center was pretty much a straight run down the Turnpike. (Last year we did a 4-hour plus road trip to Beantown). The Center has an amphitheater with indoor concession stands. That, along with the A/C, came in handy as the day wore on. People could take a break from the heat (in the 90's), and get something decent to eat (dogs, burgers, etc.). It was a beautiful day (and night) and the Tweeter Center and Warped Tour staffs did a good job getting everyone in as quickly as possibly, and helping the kids throughout the day. The only problem we could see was that it was hard to find out when the bands were playing (as always on the Warped Tour, every band played half hour sets, from the big stars to the baby bands).

The place was divided into 3 stage areas, with the amphitheater in the middle. On each side of the Center were the main stages, and also smaller stages for local bands. One of the things I like about the Warped Tour is they let local bands (Tokyo Rose played a solid set) get some high profile exposure they usually wouldn't get. They also had a "Ladies Lounge," which offered a space to kick back, buy CD's, meet the bands, and so on, with some of the coolest female punk bands around (Lo-Ball, The Eyeliners).The Lounge has been with the Tour since it started, and is an interesting change of pace from the mostly male-dominated bands.

The three of us (myself, my son Steve, and his friend Tim) split up and covered as much as we could. We got our band/show time list from Wendy (Tour publicist). She was very helpful with logistics and times for band interviews. After figuring out who we wanted to see and interview during the afternoon (Tim & Steve were like kids in a candy store with all the choices), I headed to the North stage while Tim and Steve went to the amphitheater and South stage.

This year, Drive Thru Records sponsored their own stage. New and established bands like Early November & Homegrown played solid sets.

Tim and Steve started out by seeing Something Corporate. They have a good, pop/punky, emo sound. "I Kissed a Drunk Girl," "I Woke Up in a Car," & a cover of Jane's Addiction "Been Caught Stealin' " got the crowd excited early on (it was about 12 noon).

Across the way, the Drive-Thru stage hosted newcomers Early November. An energized, pop/punk band, you could tell by their young, cherubic faces that they were glad to be there. During their short, fun set, "Open Eyes" got the sedate (again, it was around noon) crowd up. After their set, I saw some of the band's parents hanging with them.

The bands pretty much kept playing one right after the other. I took a quick tour of the area and found The Ladies Lounge & The Warped Are They Now tent. The Lounge was a tent setup with cool stuff you could buy from the female bands that were playing (Eyeliners, Lo-Ball, & a few female fronted bands) and other punk merchandise.

Warped Are They Now, hosted by Heather Morales (she was like an encyclopedia of past Tours), featured large, framed photos (by Lisa Johnson), of a lot of the bands (Bad Religion, Bosstones, etc.), and the fans. They also had a colorful Warped Tour book that you could check out or buy (www.warpedtour.com). The Ladlies Lounge and Warped Are They Now, along with the various band tables, etc., were low-key, and didn't take away from the performances, which I thought was cool.

Even with the 3 of us, the logistics (shows, interviews, etc.), were a challenge, but there was never a dull moment. Like when Steve & Tim caught Homegrown's set about halfway through. "We came in during their cover of Aqua's "Barbie Girl," (Homegrown's version is the best, being faster, & more punk), which got the crowd into a pit, creating a huge dust cloud covering everyone there.-Fun shit!" Steve reported.

Guttermouth added some musical comic relief. Steve & Tim: "When we first got there, Guttermouth was just coming on. There was a big crowd for them. All their songs were great punk tunes with hysterical lyrics. The pits were huge (at least 5 per song)! Once they played the closer "Perfect World," we got right into the pit. For some odd reason, they remind me of a drunken version of the Ramones. - fast, hard and a little sloppy, but fun. Overall, a great set that rocked"!

The press area in the back of the Tweeter Center was cool and cordial. I interviewed Benji and Billy from Good Charlotte.

Q: What does the new album offer that the last one didn't?

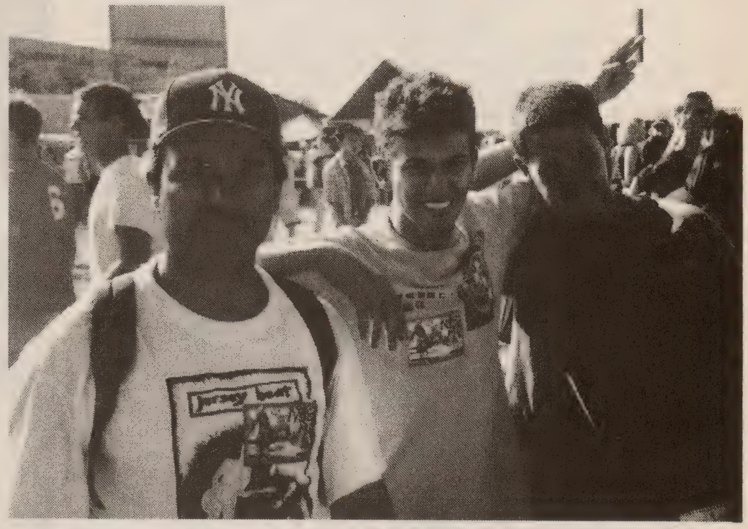
Benji: It's been 3 years in the making. The songs are more mature, and we feel we're better musicians. Also, they're more crafted, and we were able to spend more time on them.

Q: What separates you from contemporary punk rock bands like Blink or Sum 41?

Billy: Obviously, our core (punk rock) is similar, but we don't use drum loops, and we like to do more ballads.

Q; What else would you like the listeners to get out of the album?

Benji: Positivity



Phil, Steve, & Tim, our JB crew; below, Dicky from The Bosstones

After Guttermouth, Lagwagon played and got everyone pumped up again. The pits were nice (no jerks either)! A punk rawk band with surprisingly sweet vocal harmonies. Steve: "Their vocals were very good (I usually look for content first). For a band I hadn't heard before, they could be a new addition to my list of CD's to buy"!

Tim & Steve: "MxPx was better than we thought they'd be! 'My Life Story,' 'Responsibility,' & 'Chick Magnet' (everyone knew this one) were like punk rock anthems. Their cover of The Clash's 'Should I Stay or Should I Go' kicked butt with Lagwagon coaxing the crowd into a loud chant!"

Before their set, I got a quick interview with Reel Big Fish in their tour bus. Tom (road manager) was as helpful as he was last year, when we interviewed RBF in Asbury Park.

Talking to these guys is an experience onto itself. Between laughs, their answers usually go off on tangents, creating a whole universe of ideas, thought, and general mayhem! Asking standard Q & A (I should have known better), like "What do you want your listeners to get out of your new album"? Scott (Trumpet/vocals) said he wants the album to be the *Thriller* of Ska. A good answer, but as the rest of the band chimed in, it's like trying to talk to the Marx Bros. You get a wide spectrum of hilarious, tongue in cheek answers, and somewhere in there lies the truth, sort of.

RBF opened their set with their frantic cover of Aha's "Take On Me," which they contributed to the *Baseketball* soundtrack a few years ago. Fans old enough to remember the original (along with their parents), were jarred by a jolt of reminiscence. They kicked the shit out of the song, making it special and different! For "She Has a Girlfriend Now," they brought out a fan, Maria Pappadakis who handled the female vocals like a pro. She was having a blast, which was reflected in the band's animated stage presence, and the crowd's wild reaction!

"Sell Out" & "Beer," along with a few new songs (the kids knew all the words), had the crowd surfers flying over the barricades into the waiting arms of the staff (the staff was very cool throughout the whole day). On the latter song, they pumped out a little of Zeppelin's "D'yer Maker." (They barely stopped to catch their breath or say a few words to the crowd). All through their set, wild guitars bumped into the horns, while the horns slammed into the drums, bringing home the punch line. - Just a wild, fun time!

Toward evening, the Bosstones stared drawing a huge crowd. Everyone started to chant as the band came on stage in 'old school' attire. Black shirts & pants with white shoes & ties (no jackets, it was in the 90's). Dickie (lead singer) greeted the crowd saying that "This (Camden/Philly) was the city of Bosstonian love!" Steve said he finally got to hear "Dr. D." live (he loved it), which the band doesn't often play. "1-2-3-8" was turned into a a sing a long, as the huge crowd skanked to it and their new song "You Gotta Go."

Once they started playing "Holy Smoke," you knew the pit would go hard-core! After that, "Everybody Better" was a good 'cool down' song. With a bit of a reggae, the Bosstones had all the Rude Boys & Girls (guys & gals who are into ska), skankin' like they were in heaven!

There were a good number of parents with their kids here. I even spotted some of the mothers singing along to the newer songs.- No Reverse Daycare (a lounge for parents) for these punk rock moms!

Last year Flogging Molly was the surprising newcomer to the Warped Tour. Their fresh style of Irish punk rock was like no other we had heard. This year they were one of the headliners, and were closing the show in Camden. We expected a good show, but nothing like we got. Flogging Molly played their asses (arses, if you're Irish) off from start to finish! It was the take no prisoners, shoot the wounded type of show you see once in great while.

The day was starting to cool off, and we watched a beautiful sunset as the band walked out the stage. The lead said "It was an Irish tradition to throw a big fookin' party!" The crowd went nuts as the band launched into their song. "Selfish Man." "Devil's Dance Floor," and "What's Left of the Flag" were all red hot barnburners. The band stomped, danced, and cavorted on the stage. What amazed me was the flute/violin player, who was like the calm center of the hurricane as she played beautiful, subtle melodies amid the organized chaos on stage..

Introducing "What's Left of the Flag," the lead singer said, "White, pink, green, blue, the color of a flag doesn't matter. The only color a flag needs is the color of freedom!" For the rest of their set, Flogging Molly kept gaining energy, and building momentum, taking the crowd right along with them. They snuck in a little tribute to the Bouncing Souls, with a few choruses of '"Ole!" (damn, I wish the Souls would play it live). "Rebels of the Sacred Heart," from their latest release, just flat out rocked. They really turned up the volume (especially on the drums), and blasted this one out! "Swagger" the closing number, had most of the crowd with their arms around one another, swaying to it's hymn-like rhythm. As everyone started to fade, the song slipped into an accordion solo with one of the guys from NOFX joining the accordion player on stage. A great ending to a day that was at at times wild, frantic, but above all, fun!

Miscellaneous misses, thank yous & Punker Than You Category;

Good bands we heard but didn't have room for;

Bad Religion (great set!), Ozma, Good Charlotte, Alkaline Trio, BigWig, Reach The Sky, Deviates, Eyeliners, Lo-Ball, The Used, New Found Glory, The Damned

Punker Than You category; We met Adam (11 y.o.), Sabrina (14), & Kristen (13), with their parents toward the end of the day. Dressed in 'old school' punk clothing, I noticed a Ramones sticker on Adam's shirt. When I asked them about what bands they were interested in, they mentioned the Buzzcocks and Dead Kennedys. Seeing how these were cool but obscure bands (especially for their age), I wondered where they had heard them. They said their father had got them into the older punk bands, and they naturally got into the newer bands, getting their father interested along the way. Let's hear it for all the punk rock parents out there!

Drive-Thru's recent NJ signing Early November

Flogging Molly

A homemade "I Hate New Found Glory" t-shirt

warped tour 2002

Due to scheduling conflicts, we weren't able to attend the Warped Tour this year but we have this report from reporter Lucy Rayberg, who seems to have hit it off with one of the Berlin Project (see above.)

by Lucy Rayberg

HIFI BUYS AMPHITHEATER, ATLANTA,, GA – August 1, 2002 — Thousands of people are tangled together to form a sea of bodies. There is a substantial cloud of cigarette smoke hovering above my head. I see a massive collection of people thrusting themselves at each other to see who will get hurt. This mosh pit proceeds to get more out of control as I try to push and shove my way up front. I manage to grab the railing up front just in time to dodge a foot that was aimed at my head from a crowd surfer not enjoying the loads of people touching him. Where am I? At a concert, duh! But this is not just an ordinary concert. This is the hottest punk rock concert of the summer, Vans Warped Tour 2002!

So what is so unique about this concert? Some say it was the giant Slip N' Slide that people would plunge into just to cool off. Others say it was the only time they get to see their favorite skaters ripping up the half-pipes with gnarly runs while listening to their favorite music at the same time. Some say it was the $10 CD deals and other merchandise plus all the giveaways you could find only here. While others still claimed it was their only chance to meet all their favorite punk bands. Vans Warped Tour had tents for each band where the band would periodically be seen signing autographs and meeting the fans. I thought the most unique thing about Vans Warped Tour was the amazing band line-up they had. It included popular punk bands such as Good Charlotte, Mighty Mighty Bosstones, New Found Glory, Bad Religion and Reel Big Fish to less known yet excellent bands like Alkaline Trio, No Use For A Name, Thursday, Flogging Molly, Anti-Flag, Sloppy Meateaters, The Briggs and The Berlin Project. With eight stages, numerous skate ramps, and fun activities, the 10-hour day never got boring. My favorite band of the day without a doubt was The Used. Their performance just screamed punk rock at its heart and I'm not talking about the singer's vocals, which were stronger than anyone's I have seen. Although they didn't attract a large crowd (Hot Water Music and Alkaline Trio were playing at the same time,) it didn't stop them from putting on a truly amazing show. On the downside of things, a band that I think didn't pull out all the stops was NOFX. Their performance lacked a certain enthusiasm other bands had; maybe it was when the lead singer so bluntly said, "I've never been so unexcited about playing a show." The giant YooHoo promo beach balls that hit the stage during the performances certainly didn't excite them much either. It just caused the lead singer to pull out a knife and start stabbing as many balls as he could. The closing band, MXPX , followed NOFX's performance with an impressive show and the biggest audience of the day.

Overall, Vans Warped Tour put on another fun and exciting day for us this year. There's no reason why 2003 should be any worse. Between punk rock shows and skate demos all the way to the giant Slip N' Slide it was a memorable event for everybody! No one could have left without saying every part of their day was super exciting. To anyone who might have missed it, there's always next year! Till then check out all these bands on their own tours coming soon

WHAT S NEW FROM NEW JERSEY

DEWEY DEFEATED – "Global Warming Gone Haywire" EP (www.deweydefeated.com) The loss of bassist Steve Panyko could have been a crushing blow for this band. He supplied not only a good deal of Dewey Defeated's sound but its stage presence as well. So it was great to see the band rebound and retool, changing its chemistry to fit the current membership. Live, the band sounds better than it ever has, and this EP – a teaser for a forthcoming full-length – suggests that songwriting and recording have only improved as well. The title track starts off with a stinging guitar riff and a thumping drum intro that introduces a heavier, nastier Dewey Defeated, as if these indie twang-poppers had been overdosing on Pixies and Girls Against Boys lately. "Springtime In America" continues the GvsB comparison, with call-and-response nonsense vocals over a gritty guitar track and cheeseball 70's cowbell and woodblock percussion, a good example of Dewey Defeated's understated but potently pawky wit at work. The last track is an atmospheric, jangly instrumental. Alas, the band recently announced that it had broken up. - Jim Testa

DRIVER X - *Super X* (Reel to Reel Records, P.O. Box 944 New York, NY 10009) For those of you who like your pop-rock music done with a certain crisply proficient and straightforward craftsmanship, this little 12-track number (featuring ex-Dangaru frontman Phil Yaros) will most definitely do the trick. The busy, harmonic, and gracefully dulcet arrangements are pleasingly tight and complex; the songs begin in a deceptively slow, lulling manner and carefully build up to a thrilling and fairly cookin' bridge without ever overdoing it. The lead singer's plaintive moan is likewise quite effective, expressing regret and sorrow with striking clarity. The concise songwriting scores a bull's eye as well: Pithy and reflective, the laconically on-target lyrics get right to the point with admirable directness and keep sentiment to a refreshing minimum. However, what really brings this over as an album that's well worth hearing is the impressive way the neatly intricate melodies switch from soft and restrained to gritty and propulsive with utmost ease and finess. – Joe Wawyrzniak

THE FIENDZ – *Redemption* (Black Pumpkin PO Box 4377, River Edge NJ 07661) Wow, this local NJ band has come a long way since their more Misfits-inspired material of the Eighties. *Redemption* consists of 12 mid-tempo pop songs accentuated by Jerry Jones' melodic vocals and rich, rich harmonies. Anyone who enjoys All's slower stuff will love the new Fiendz. Make no mistake, these are pure power pop songs, all grown up and well-written; the word "pop-punk" would really be wholly inappropriate here. So, some might find this wimpy, or the simple (but totally effective) lyrics and sentiments shmaltzy. Well, fuck those people. It should also be noted that The Fiendz really deserve a few paragraphs in the big book of NJ punk history if for nothing other than their longevity (as well as that of their label, Black Pumpkin.) *Redemption* is a pleasure. I hope these guys tour soon. – Johnny Puke

KNUCKLE SANDWICH - *Nice* (Resurrection AD Records, PO Box 763, Red Bank, NJ 07701) This disc has a number of levels existing within the guise of fairly traditional hardcore, for while nothing particular stood out as being wholly original or unique, there is an interesting discussion of politics and relationships discussed throughout Nice. Starting with the 9/11 inspired "American Song," lead vocalist Richie speaks directly to our president and says "even though I'm not your biggest fan, this song is a show of my support." Nice extension of an olive branch by a man who sounds fundamentally Democratic, but certainly does not want polarize political opinions. Fine. Later, however, Richie offers "Dub-ya" these words of wisdom: "Sometimes George, you gotta be mean/Forget about the voters who are hugging trees." OK, so now we are right wingers? I was a little confused, and I like Richie was as well. It summarized the lack of clarity a tragedy such as 9/11 can create, but while the song was solid musically, the lyrics came across a a bit childish and reactionary. From there, Nice alternates between songs of relationships and their limitations ("It's Not You It's Me," "Apart," "Room to Breathe," "I Want More" and "Comfort of Security," with the last two efforts chastising the notions of marital bliss), and social comments such as "Amber Waves of Greed," Sucker" and "Double Speak." The band wants to be politically active and voice opinions of anger and dismay with our political system, but it is done with a far less venomous strike than a band such as Anti-Flag. The strongest of the group is "Broken Record," a track that lambastes anyone who attempts to find a link between violence and music. This was well done and very sharp, particularly when Richie laments "If this is the voice of my generation/Take my microphone away from me." Musically, I have heard more technically skilled bands and bands with greater eruptive force, however, this is slick, well honed hardcore that should get the teens bouncing. I think the band hopes to rais awareness of what is happening politically, which is to their credit, and I will be interested to see where Knuckle Sandwich goes lyrically in the future. - Rich Quinlan

It's a bird, it's a plane, it's....

tom smith

By Phil Rainone
with help from Steve Rainone & Sean Wilday

We met Tom Smith at Zapp! Comics in Freehold Mall during a promotion for his work & the release of the new Spiderman movie. Besides being friendly and easy to talk to, Tom loved to talk about the Marvel Universe & comics in general. We talked about his work on comic books, the Spiderman movie, Sam Rami (director of Spiderman), & Stan Lee's work with Kevin Smith (they colaberated on a comic book, and Kevin interviewed Stan for an upcoming video. Tom is best known as a colorist, and got his first big break coloring The Avengers for Marvel Comics. His credits include work on *X-Men 2099*, *Venom*, *Silver Surfer*, *Gambit*, and the recent *Avengers* relaunch with George Perez.

We talked for about a half hour in between him signing posters. He even brought a promo copy of the Spiderman soundtrack that he played a few tunes from for us. The soundtrack includes songs by The Hives and the title track performed by Aerosmith (their cover is blusey & a little slice of greasy rock& roll, but not as good as the Ramones' more rockin' version of the song, which is not on the soundtrack. Since our conversation was off the record, Tom was nice enough to agree to a formal email interview afterwards, and here it is:

Q: What got you into comics?

Tom: A true love for the comic art form ,comics, and the heroes of coarse.

Q: What did you collect growing up?

Tom: Batman , Spiderman , The Hulk , almost all Marvel & DC comics , I still do. I also love the original Universal Monsters and collect everything Universal, like Frankenstien and The Creature from the Black Lagoon.

Q: Why do you love comics?

Tom: What's not to like? You have big colorful larger than life heroes and villains and some of the best artists and writers in the world working on them.

Q: If you could be any superhero, who would you be ?

Tom: Superman, he got the least amount of problems in his life and the coolest powers. Sure he has to save the world every 3 minutes but he still does not have any of the mental anguish that Batman, Spiderman or the Hulk have.

Q: What do you think about the new Spiderman movie?

Tom: I loved it !! I saw it two times opening day! I feel it is the first true comic book movie. Sam Rami did a get job directing and everyone's performances were right on.

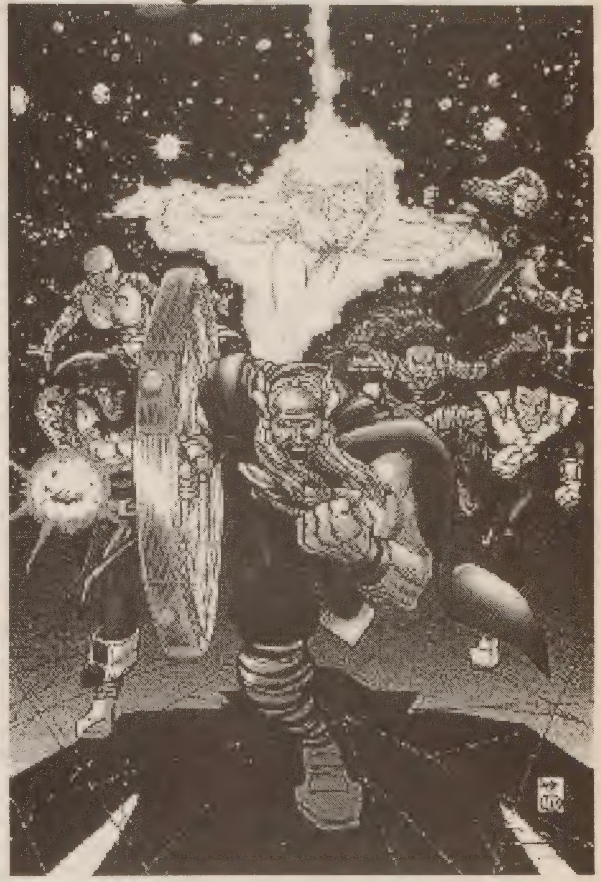
Q: Do you think it was accurate, compared to the comic book?

Tom: Not 100% but they came pretty damn close.

Q: Have you worked with Stan Lee? What was it like working with him?

Tom: I have only worked with Stan Lee once or twice in my career and it is always a thrill to work with the man who co-created and started the whole Marvel Universe.

Q: We've heard that Kevin Smith has worked with Stan & has done some comic book work. What do you know about their collaboration, & have you done any work with Kevin?



Tom: Not much , I know they did a DVD interview together , Kevin interviewing Stan, it's on my to-buy list. Kevin has written some amazing comic stories over the last few years and I hope to someday work with him on one.

Q: Have you worked with the director of the Spiderman movie, Sam Rami? Any thoughts on his directing in general?

Tom: He is one of my favorite directors! I love his *Evil Dead* movies and I think he was a perfect choice for Spiderman's director. He did a great job ! As for working with him , I would jump at the chance to do so.

Q: What do think of the Spiderman soundtrack?

Tom: It's a lot of fun, I especially like Aerosmith's rendition of the Spiderman theme song – "Spiderman, Spiderman does what even a spider can..." Yeooow !

Q: Is there anything you'd like to add on your future plans, comics or anything you care to talk about?

Tom: I'm working on what now will be the biggest project coming out from Marvel and DC comics next year... Avengers / JLA with Kurt Busick and comic book legend artist George Pérez. It is a project that comic book fans have been waiting for 20 years to see, It is going to be major. I'm also working on Avengers and Defenders for Marvel Comics every month; they are available at a comic shop near you.

bright eyes cryin' in the rain

Some thoughts on Conor Oberst and the commercialization of misery

by Jim Testa

BRIGHT EYES - Maxwells, Hoboken NJ - Sept. 20, 2002

I accidentally discovered Conor Oberst (aka Bright Eyes) at the 1998 SXSW music convention, when he played on a bill right after Harvey Danger. Harvey Danger's publicist had cajoled me into checking them out, and unbeknownst to any of us, there were just a few weeks away from becoming the One Hit Wonder of the year with their single "Flagpole Sitta." At SXSW '98, though, they were still unknown kids from the Pacific Northwest. But there were a few dozen industry types there nonetheless.

Not so for Bright Eyes, who played to about ten people that evening. It didn't matter; all ten of us left diehard fans, and nine of us bought CD's, as I recall. I rushed back to my hotel room and immediately played mine all night, and spent the rest of SXSW forcing anyone within earshot to listen to at least one Bright Eyes song on my Discman. The Conor Oberst I met that day was a mopey, pimply, terminally-virginal adolescent who sang in a tortured, raspy whisper that exploded into anguished screams, plucking out random notes on a beat-up old guitar. I spoke to him after the set, and while he was obviously pleased to meet a new fan, his demeanor didn't change much from his stage persona. He mumbled, he shuffled, and he looked truly miserable. I fell in love with the kid right there, as many others have done since; but listening to those tortured lyrics and having met him in person, I seriously wondered if he'd live long enough to finish high-school. A year later, I met Conor at SXSW again. He had started touring and was beginning to get noticed by the fanzine and underground press. He had a really nice haircut, his skin had cleared up, and he had shot up a few inches, giving him an appealingly lanky frame (no longer the hunched-over high-school nerd). And he was smiling. I said hello and he remembered me from the year before. We shook hands and I said, "You've got a girlfriend, don't you?" He smiled and blushed and nodded his head. Man, you want to ward off a teenage suicide, just get the kid laid. It does wonders.

I brushed elbows with Conor Oberst again at this sold-out solo show at Maxwells. It was hard to believe it was the same person. Here he was, the huggy-kissy indie-rock pinup boy, hugging just about every girl in the room, slurping down red wine with gay abandon, laughing and meeting and greeting and having a great time. Then he climbed on stage, picked up his guitar, and suddenly he was the old Conor again, crying out to us with raw, naked emotion through a wall of intolerable pain. And I thought to myself, oh my god, it's all just an act now.

Which isn't really true, at least not entirely. And is – don't get me wrong – a good thing. I'm glad that Conor Oberst has blossomed, matured, and found himself. It would have been horrible if he had succumbed to his pubescent demons and wound up institutionalized (or worse,) denying to his talent to the world. As Bright Eyes, he still has the power to reach people, and that is a very rare commodity. Oberst speaks to his audience – and especially, it seems, to teenagers – with a clarity that few other singer-songwriters can approach. That was apparent in the altogether creepy presence of at least a dozen Conor Oberst lookalikes at the show - wan, skinny teenage boys with bad haircuts in thrift-store clothes. Conor is clearly the geek role model of the new millennium... and that is a good thing too.

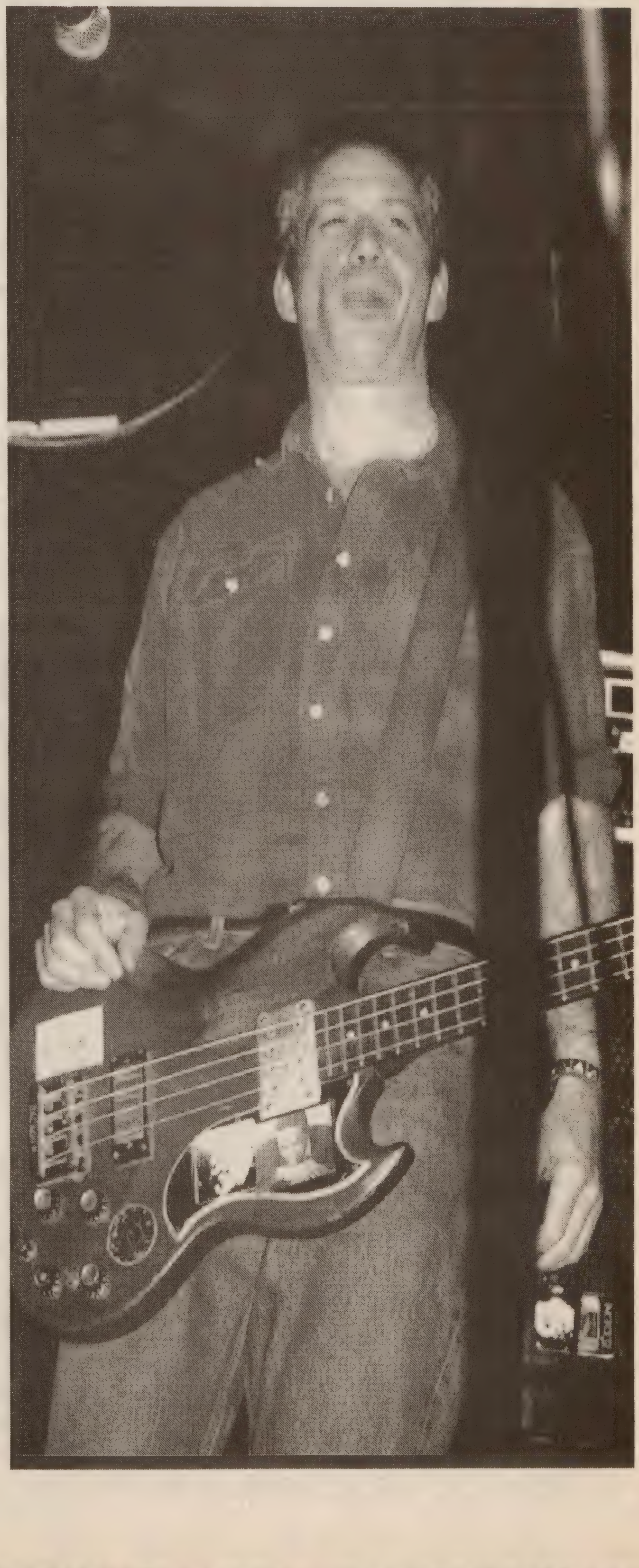
Some of his songs still focus on the mewling self-pity of his earlier records, but more and more, his new songs have an element of optimism and hope in them. He's seen things get better, so he's singing about the promise of a better tomorrow. And that is also a good thing. Touring with his rock band, Desparaceidos, has done wonders for him; he sings much more forcefully (and stays on key a lot more too,) plays guitar with much more confidence and conviction, is much more playful with his audience, and his band now seems to know what they're doing (early Bright Eyes shows often seemed almost improvisational – or at least badly under-rehearsed.) Two of the songs he did tonight talked about "staying in character" and people playing a role; on the surface, the songs seemed to be about girls who had betrayed him (a common theme in his music) but listening between the lines, you had to think that he was singing about himself too.

To quote another poet turned professional songsmith, "something's lost but something's gained in living every day." Conor Oberst is no longer the fragile, damaged little boy that some of us discovered and fell in love with. But as Bright Eyes, he is still one of the most passionate and emotional songwriters of his generation; even if his songs are often wordy and seem to go on forever, they remain full of insights and thoughts and fears that many of us would rather not face... but need to. We'll probably never know how many teenagers he's gotten through their own dark nights, how many souls his music has saved. We just know that music saved him. And that is a very good thing indeed.

mike watt

Tugboat Or Minuteman? Contemplating The Hereafter

Interview and photos by Jim Testa



If I were an American history buff, my biggest wish might be to sit down and chat with Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. It I were a baseball nut, maybe it would be Babe Ruth and Joe DiMaggio. But since I'm a punk rock fan, I'm quite content having the opportunity to sit and talk with Mike Watt.

As a member of the Minutemen, Watt helped blaze the trail for American indie rock in this country. In fIREHOSE, he not only continued flying the flannel flag for his own brand of personal punk, but his long and mutually beneficial relationship with Columbia Records has proven that you can work through a major label and retain your independence. And finally, there's Watt himself, one of the last great American Beatniks, a musician who ranks among the most influential bassists in the history of rock and roll, and a raconteur with a million stories and his own unique lingo. When Watt talks about "jammin' econo," he means touring the way he's always toured – totally DIY and as cheaply as possible, free from major-label tour support and just about guaranteed to come home with money in your pocket. And when he talks about "laying down a spiel," he means doing an interview like this one... which basically consisted of me holding up my Walkman, and Watt just talking about whatever entered his mind.

We met at Maxwells, before Watt's show there as part of his "Our Oars Became Wings" tour: Watt on bass, accompanied by Jerry Trebotic on drums and Pete Mazich on organ, two guys he found back home in his native San Pedro, working the docks by day and playing in a wedding band by night. The music was a weird fusion of pop and jazz and punk, mad organ solos and crazy bass licks, with Watt playing some oldies and some covers, and debuting new songs he had written from a projected rock opera on the subject of death. The band had played in Brooklyn the night before, at a bigger club, and had gotten pretty loud. The next morning, Watt woke up with blood gushing out of his inner ear. "Must not be used to the noise anymore," he joked from the stage, wearing a huge bandage over the bloody ear.

Watt's preoccupation with his own mortality was understandable. He was still recovering from a near fatal illness – a tumor the size of a grapefruit had been carved from his gut. More on all that later. My intention was to talk about what Watt was doing now, but by the time I had turned on my tape recorder, he was already deep into a spiel about punk and his generation of SoCal punk rockers, with the inevitable tangents to his best friend and partner in the Minutemen, the late D.Boon, and a whole lot more....

Watt: ...A lot of the older bands, they're still out there, they're not going away. They're not so much about *Happy Days* and *American Grafitti*. They're more interested in being in the now. A lot of the cats who are still in the game, I'm not saying that they're playing Flavor Of The Week. They hold on to their old thing. But they're not so much nostalgia freaks, and they don't think that music back then is the only thing that's good. They adapt.

Q: I think whenever music gets really stale, nostalgia inevitably seeps back into the mainstream. As far as contemporaries of yours, you've got the Descendents, they were the biggest band on the Warped Tour last year. The Circle Jerks are touring again. The Dead Kennedys are back, with a different singer... Bad Religion is still going strong.

Watt: What I've noticed with young people in punk is that they're very interested in the old days. Seems to be that they sense something in their gut about this packaged kind of punk, this pop stuff that's big right now. It (the original punk scene) must have not been just some kind of Halloween costume that you'd wear or just a different kind of rock n roll, there must have been something to it. Because it was such a small little scene, why would you stick to it, do what we did for it? So the kids are very curious about what it was like. Why would you do that? Why, if the majority of people hated it, why were you into it?

Because they've come into a scene where it's almost the normal thing to go through your punk phase in your teens. So they talk to me about what it was it like. Or they listen to the records, the Minutemen records and other records, and they ask, why were you guys punk? You don't sound like some of these other hardcore bands. And you have to tell 'em, that was the point. Being different is why you did it, that's what made you a punk. Maybe it was because our punk from the Seventies was a little different from what happened in the Eighties. It was older people, with strong influences from strange English bands like Wire and The Pop Group. And the Hollywood scene too was very eclectic too. A lot of those cats were artists and from the glitter scene. In a lot of ways, they were reacting against the rock 'n' roll of the day. But to the young people who discovered that scene, that was their first rock 'n' roll.

It's kind of hard to put yourself in those shoes now. People ask, well, why didn't the Minutemen sound more like Black Flag or the Replacements? Well, that was the point. We thought that copying anybody else was the worst insult you could do. So out of that came this weird kind of movement, where you're all different but you're all spurring each other on. There never would have been a *Double Nickels On The Dime* (the Minutemen's landmark double album on SST) in Husker Du hadn't done *Zen Arcade.* Those cats came to town and made that thing, and we thought, whoa! We should have a double record too, so we wrote all these songs. Recorded and mixed it in one day. But the thing is, it wasn't like we were all little islands, rock stars and shit. We were all in it together, but there was also something about trying to find your own voice.

Up until we started going to Hollywood to see those other bands, all we knew was arena rock. It was very inspiring for us to see these bands who were yelling and screaming and didn't know how to play their instruments, trying to make something out of that. Meanwhile we were back in the rehearsal space trying to learn Blue Oyster Cult and Creedence songs. It's hard to put people in those shoes. It sounds naïve, and it was naïve, but that shit blew our minds and changed our lives forever. And we *were* a punk band. We were from the punk scene. We sounded different, but that was good. We stuck to our guns and just did what we did, even though it wasn't popular. There are books being written about all this now, and that's a good thing. Because for a long time, writers were not so much the cats from the scene, but English majors who came along later. They saw Sex Pistols and Nirvana and it's like there was nothing going on in between. So it's good Michael Azerrad and Steve Blush and some other cats are writing these books.

The only thing I have against those books is that you read what they wrote about us, about the Minutemen and the other bands back then, and it's like they're trying to make victims out of us. And I know what it is, the writers have big hearts for us, and they're trying to say there was no justice, that these bands should have become millionaires or whatever. But what was, was. And a lot of the reason that we were the way that we were is because we weren't accepted. So I don't know if mass acceptance back then, if we had been as popular as some of the New Wave bands became, I don't know if that would have been success, or justice, or victory.

Q: I think you can certainly say that careerism in punk is something that's pretty recent. The idea that you could be a punk band and actually get rich and famous doing it didn't exist back in the Seventies, early Eighties.

Watt: Exactly. So we put all our energy into being original. Because what did you have to sell out for? You weren't going to make it anyway. We would see some bands try that. X tried that, and every X record sold less and less. The more mersh they got, the less popular they got. {Editor's note: "Mersh" is Watt slang for commercial, slick, corporate, etc..} The Del Fuegos, some of these other bands that would sign to a major label, and the first thing they'd do is round off the corners. And it never worked for them. So we figured we'd just stick to our guns, and at the end of the day, at least you've got some wild tours in there and some interesting music that you can call your own. You can never feel bad about it. But I don't think we failed. Even though we never had the commercial success, I don't think what we did was a failure. I think we went way beyond our expectations. I couldn't believe we were playing in other people's towns. Let alone making records or any of this stuff.

Q: Hey, I was around for most of that, I knew some of those bands, and I don't think any of them ever felt like failures just because they didn't sell a million records.

watt

Watt: Right, because for every negative thing, how many positive things were there? So the net result was total victory, beyond our expectations. So I think when people read these books, they gotta keep this in mind. I think the mentality that might come out of all this is, like, "We can't do anything good today because all the good stuff has been done already." And being from back then, I can tell you, a lot of it was just circumstance. Your birthday came then and someone else's birthday came now. And it's really of lame, it's really kind of a shit-horn, to think that cats today can't take the baton, and be a link in the chain. Why should it only be Back In The Day? Why does it have to be Old School? Back when it was real? It can be real today. There's a lot of stuff to react to today.

Q: Who have you seen recently that really blew you away?

Watt: I played with these kids from Sweden, the International Noise Conspiracy, they were like 21, 22 years old. And they weren't acting like some kind of commercial, big label thing. They were going crazy, spouting their views, and most cats were going for it. It reminded me a lot of early Minutemen. Not the sound so much but the attitude. And they had on suits, like the early Jam thing. They were bizarre. I see a lot of these bands every tour, cats who aren't afraid to go for their own thing. And they're always interested in hearing about the old days, but it's not like they want to copy those days, but they want to pick up on some of the ethics. And that ain't a bad idea, everybody just jumping in a van and trying to find your own sound.

And you know, we didn't invent DIY, there were cats doing it before me. Vaudeville, burlesque. I still basically follow the same circuit that those cats used - clockwise in the fall, counter-clockwise in the Spring. That's a hundred year old tradition. A lot of this hasn't just been invented. What is constantly being invented, or reinvented, is finding your own sound. People say, well, there are only so many notes, what can you do that's new? There are only 26 letters in the alphabet, but you can still write a really original novel. So why is music different?

[We take a break so Watt can do soundcheck. When we resume, we start talking about Watt's recent bout with illness, his recovery, and his comeback tour with J Mascis and Ron Asheton (of the original Iggy & The Stooges band,) where they played a set of Stooges covers.]

Watt: I had this thing in me the size of a basketball and they had to cut it out. I was in the hospital for months. So I was really hurting. They had tubes and bags in me the whole time I was in the hospital, and when I came out, I couldn't play bass at all. I had started at 13 with D. Boone and I had never stopped. This was the first time I had ever stopped playing. So when I came back to it, I couldn't play at all. I couldn't do scales, rhythms, nothing. So I started playing Stooges covers. Not a lot of chord changes there, y'know? And I slowly started getting back to it. And then I started doing short sets, just Stooges covers, with J Mascis. That's how that started. Then J says, why don't you ask Ron to come play with us? So we wound up doing nine or ten gigs with him. And for me, growing up in the Seventies, being on stage with Ron was like playing with Marc Bolan or John Fogarty. I couldn't have ever imagined it. And he turned out to be a super-nice guy. And then in March I got to play with Scotty too, at this thing that Thurston put together, both Asheton brothers. That was wild. And man, you talk about me being from the old days, these cats are from *older* days. So kids would come up to me and talk about the Minutemen, and say, 'you were so cool, you didn't care what anybody thought, you were so in the moment.' And then you look at what the Stooges did, and we were just a shadow thing. Kids look at me and they think I'm the original, and I say no, it's just this process. See? It's all about handing it down. George Bernard Shaw said, you know, I want to burn bright and long until I can hand it off. And that's the philosophy I would like to carry through too.

So that whole episode doing the Stooges songs was wild to me. I loved them songs, and they helped me get strong enough to go out on my own again. They had to cut me open to save my life, so I had to heal from the inside. And it was a lot of months in bed. My skin was still yellow when I started touring again, but I thought, the only way to really get going again is to jump back on the horse. So I started playing with J. And J had me playing bass with a pick again! I hadn't played with a pick in 17 years. So there's been a lot of loop-de-loops lately getting me to where I am today. But it's all been to help me get strong enough to be out on my own again. That fucking sickness ripped so much out of me that I decided I needed to take something out of it. So I'm getting an album out of it.

Q: So this tour, you're trying out the new album, which is all about your sickness?

Watt: Well, the first 15 minutes of this show is the new songs. Then we do some old stuff. Got me an all San Pedro band again for the first time in a long time. These guys have never been on tour before, ten years playing in a wedding band. They're longshoremen, they load boats. And they're good musicians. And there's something good too about getting dudes who aren't too plugged into the music situation. It's almost like being young punk rockers again. They don't have to fake it, it's all really new to them. Jerry's been playing in an Italian-Croatian wedding band, he's got the chops, he's got classical training. But he hasn't really toured. Now he's on the road with us, and he really loves it.

I wanted to do a shake down before I did an album. I wanted him to get a sense of my life, of what I've been doing for 22 years. Which is basically... I've made a lot of records, but mainly I've toured. The records are really just flyers... well, they're two things. They're flyers for my gigs, and they're also ways for me to jump off and try new things. Like the opera we did last time, or the Wrestling record. With the Minutemen, God, every time we got a crazy new idea, we'd go for it. You could do that because you can record it and fuck up, and then erase it if it sucks. When all you do is play in front of people, you kinda get to the point where you want to play stuff that gets good reaction, and that maybe hurts growing, or being adventurous. So when you're in the studio, nobody's watching, just go for it.

Q: How did you go from touring with J Mascis and Ron Asheton, two of the most amazing guitarists ever, to putting together a band with no guitar at all?

Watt: I've had this theory for two years. I was going to make a record about my cat. I had a cat for 17 years. And I wanted to make a record about where I was right at that moment, 42 years old, my middle life. I wanted a record right in the moment. That's why I called the band The Secondmen. Because we're right in the second. And then my cat died. God, 17 years. And then after the opera, the *Contemplating The Engine Room* record, I didn't want to make another serious record.

Then this sickness hit me. And boy, I had a record there. I kind of paralleled it to this book I loved as a kid and kind of found again, *The Divine Comedy* by Dante. The sickness part is the Inferno, the healing part is Purgatory, and Paradise is getting out with my little bass and hitting the road again.

So the idea was... I had put together so many guitar trios over the years. So I found myself in this situation where I really wanted to reinvent myself. So how about the organ? I always thought the organ made sense because it can play lower than me on bass. And then I wouldn't have to think like a bass player. But it wouldn't be like guitar either, because lord knows I'm no guitar player. So that was the thought behind it.

Q: There are people who would argue with that. The way you play bass is almost like playing lead guitar.

Watt: That's what I'm saying. So with no guitar to compete with, I wouldn't have to worry about that. I'd always get, why are you doing that, the guitar player's already doing that riff. Well, we don't have a guitar player. And since the organ can actually go lower than the bass, I don't have to be responsible for being on the low.

So this record says a lot about where I am. Like I said, the whole goal was to write something right in the moment. I'm going to record it this fall. It's a pretty heavy story but at least it has a happy ending - I lived. I was 42 then, I'm 44 now. Doing my 49th tour, 61 gigs in 62 days.

I've been touring so long that I'm kind of set in my ways. You know, I have certain ideas about how you tour. I don't like driving at night, because I think it's risky. I don't like big long hell drives between gigs, because I think it's risky. I like seat belts. There's a lot of things....

There was this one tour where I found this book, *The Sand Pebbles*. And *The Sand Pebbles* had to be me and D. Boon's favorite movie, came out in about 1966, with Steve McQueen. Well, it turns out that the guy who wrote the book was a chief in the Navy, 23 years, in the engine room. Just like my father. It was a different era, this guy was in China in the 20's and my dad was in Viet Nam. But there were a lot of similarities, man.

And it made me just think of the van as a boat, and we were like sailors. And my father old me that once. My father didn't really know about music. He just thought it was something I did for fun with D.Boon. He didn't know it was how I made my living, and he couldn't understand why I was still doing it after D. Boon was killed. So I started sending him postcards from tour, and it started dawning on. And he said, 'you know, you're like a sailor. You're in all these ports.'

It just amazed him that that's what I was doing, I was basically just playing for people in all these different towns. He didn't have any interest in records or songs, but he could relate to the traveling around from city to city.

And so years after he died – he died in 1991 – it came to me that I could relate what I was doing to his life, and I wrote the opera about his life and the life of the Minutemen as a parallel. And I put it all in one day. I got that idea from James Joyce in *Ulysses*. I starts in the morning and ends 24 hours later, and it's the whole history of the band and my pop, in a way.

Losing my pop, and losing D.Boon, those were the hardest lessons to learn in life. Especially if you're not that strong and kind of lean on people for confidence. I know I'm supposed to be independent, and I guess I am, but in a lot of ways, I'm just the Cowardly Lion inside. Last night was a very hard gig for me. Really hard.

I started crying at one point. The night before in Asbury Park I was totally frightened. And I had been coming off some tours where I had gained some confidence too. But this tour, and especially dealing with the sickness and stuff, the shit comes back on me. And that was such a fucking hell. I can't tell you what it was like. I'd be laying in bed thinking, how can this get worse? And then it'd get worse. My balls blew up to the size of softballs, all kinds of hell. This thing grew inside me and then popped. I know you're supposed to forget pain, but in a lot of ways, it's an indelible thing. So going through this music, and also playing with Pete and the organ, it's all this newness. So sometimes I don't have a lot of confidence. But I gotta push myself through this, or I'm not gonna grow.

Q: I would think that being in front of your fans would help, though. Those people love you, they're not rooting for you to fail, they're rooting for you to succeed.

I keep hearing people say that indie is dead. And all this stuff is all tired and used up. I don't want people to feel that way. For one thing, it's just a means, it's not an end. That's up to the guy making the music, dreaming the dream, finding his own voice. But as far as the means, it's probably easier right now to make a record than at any other time.

Watt: Yeah, but that's another burden in a way. You can't let them down, you can't coward out. But it's good pressure. Obviously, if it was a super super nightmare, I wouldn't do it. But it just goes to show you how much I leaned on D. Boon, and even EdFromOhio (in fIREHOSE). That man had balls like church bells, he was not scared of anything. (Drummer) George Hurley had a pretty solid backbone too, but Ed wasn't afraid of anything.

But D.Boon, man. He was a hard charger. He was an incredible personality. He made you feel like you were never outside of anything. From the moment you met him, it was like, Where have you been all my life? He was that warm of a guy. Probably because he took a little shit for being fat as a kid. I know he was big and husky!, but he was an artist. Way more than me. He could paint, he could draw. Guitarist. Very delicate hands. He had an artist's sensibility, but because of his situation, his looks and so forth, he never became elitist. You never felt you were low around D.Boon.

You must have had buddies like that, the second you met them, you just knew they were going to be your best friends. I can still remember the moment I met him, in fact I can go back to the exact spot in San Pedro. He jumped out of a tree on me, fighting with some kind named Eskimo. He had memorized this whole George Carlin record. I had never heard George Carlin, I was 13. So walking back to his house, he recites to me all the bits. And I think this guy is making this up, I think this is the smartest, funniest guy in the world. And then the next day, he played me the record and I realized he had just memorized it all. But he was still the greatest.

Q: Let me ask you one more thing. I see indie bands come and go, and they sign to major labels, and almost always, it doesn't work out and they get screwed over. It seems like you figured out a long time ago how to sustain an independent career and still work within the major label system. What is the secret to that success?

Watt: Well, I spent 11 years on SST and now 11 years on Columbia. When we were on SST, I never thought that was some childhood phase. When they told me, oh, you gotta take it up a level, I interpreted that as sayin, Oh, you deserve the privilege of paying more. So I'd just say, I'll keep it at this level.

And for the label, Columbia, I think I can give them something that no other artist on their label can give them. Maybe I can't sell a whole lot of records, but I feel good about it the same way I felt good about being on SST.

I can give them sound that maybe they can't find anywhere else, and maybe the other labels can't either. I can give them that, in a world full of cookie-cutter crap. There's enough of those, and they throw enough of them against the wall, right? I think one out of ten makes money. Maybe less than that. So they can play the game with those cats. But they have a lot of respect for me. Sure, it's a mersh company. It's a division of an electronics form. Whatever.

Q: Someone wanted me to ask you how that Minutemen song wound up on a TV commercial.

Watt: That was for D.Boon's dad. He was dying of emphysema. He died last year. It was a way that D.Boon could help without being here. That was the reason I did that.

But you know, getting back to record labels. I was just want to point out, Ian MacKaye did okay starting his own label. Joe Carducci, who used to be at SST, he has a new label. I think it's very important that people don't get cynical and think that independent music is dead. You're asking about the major label system not working anymore. Well, I keep hearing people say that indie is dead. And all this stuff is all tired and used up. I don't want people to feel that way. For one thing, it's just a means, it's not an end. That's up to the guy making the music, dreaming the dream, finding his own voice. But as far as the means, it's probably easier right now to make a record than at any other time. But that's not going to get you over the hump of being creative. That should always be a heavy challenge. Once we get to Paint By Numbers in music, it's over. Once you know what you're supposed to already like, it's over. Remember that word "Alternative?" Once we started saying that, that's the one thing it wasn't anymore.

I do have a problem sometimes with my record label, Columbia, saying 'this is mersh, this is bourgeois.' They haven't even heard it. Like doing an opera about three guys in a boat. I remember going up to the top of the Columbia building, that big thing on Madison Avenue, and here's the boss, right across from me. This guy don't blink. And I say that I want to do an opera about three guys in a boat. 'Hey, Watt, do it.' And he starts telling me how his brother drives a truck. People can relate to people on some level. I mean, you use the phone. AT&T, not too little a company. As long as the phone company isn't telling you what to say, it's just the means. Not the end.

Q: Yeah, but you still see bands sign to Columbia, and they sell about the same amount of records that you do, and six months later, they're back home flipping burgers. You've been with Columbia now for 11 years. How do you explain that?

Watt: But what deal did they make? Did they want to be big rock stars? I see these cats let the bigwigs tie the strings on them, and then they cry in the interview six months later. Why didn't they protect themselves to begin with? Why did they think they had to graduate? Why wasn't that good enough, that old way?

Nobody sees that. It's just a big leap to grab for that ring, and then you miss it and you've lost. And now they're going to try and blame the company. You know exactly what you're getting into when you get in bed with those cats.

It's just like AT&T or any other big corporation. Like Rite-Aid. You go into Rite-Aid to buy some cotton for your bleeding ear… Do you sign away your kid? No, just buy the cotton, that's enough. Probably if you wanted to hand over the kid, they'd be into it. See, so you don't have to do that with these cats at the major labels either. I'm living proof. Do you think I lasted this long because I have such a magnetic personality, or a body odor that slays people? No. I just know what I'm doing.

> But what deal did they make? Did they want to be big rock stars? I see these cats let the label tie the strings on them, and then they cry in the interview six months later. Why didn't they protect themselves to begin with?

In fact, sometimes the cats at Columbia want me to talk to the new bands about touring in vans and stuff. These cats come in with mentalities that they've just bought into some bottomless trough. But basically, all they're getting is a loan, for maybe two years. A year and a half. Maybe six months, I don't know. And then it's going to come due. Meanwhile, I'm still there.

I'm giving the label something they can't get from Mr. Dylan or Ms. Dion or Ms.Streisand… if you ever look at the Columbia roster, it's intense. It's all this music that I don't have anything to do with. But I can give them something, so I don't feel bad about that. And I don't feel bad towards them because I've never bent over. I've never been put in that situation, and that's on purpose. I did it for 11 years on SST and I basically do the same thing now. I remember the first time I brought in masters, for the *Flying The Flannel* record. The girl at the desk sent me to the mailroom. And that still happens to me. And this is with young people, not the cronies of the guys in the expensive suits at the top of the building. These are young supposedly indie-rock people, and they'll stop me backstage and go, 'So how long have you been working with Mike Watt?' He doesn't even know I'm the guy. But you know, sometimes it's good to be a little incognito. People say what they really think when they don't know who you are. I remember once riding down the elevator with some mersh guys from Columbia. These guys could have been selling socks. But on the other hand, I've met tattooed-up young record label hotshots, I won't mention any names, but you couldn't even tell we were related music-wise at all, not just taste but the ethics and all. So I judge people by their behavior, by how they're living their life. And accordingly, I should be judged that way. Outfits and uniforms? That's for war.

But it's nothing new. Let's face it, Pat Boone sold a lot more "Tutti Frutti's" than Little Richard. This shit has been going on for a long time. But one thing that I think may be more prevalent now, and is a real danger, is genre. The idea of getting so specific about labeling music that it's no longer one big family. I think this is dangerous. Music is supposed to be about bringing people together. And of course, for marketing people, this is just to make their job easy. But maybe our job is to make their job really hard.

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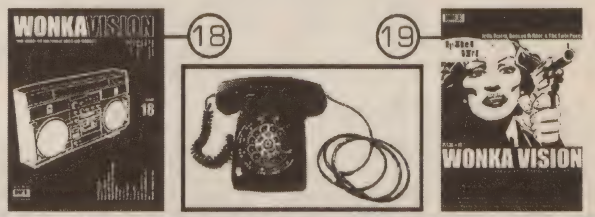

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double-breasted

harp + cello + drums = double-breasted

By Jim Testa

Ardith Collins – cello, vocals
Kristy Chmura – harp, vocals
Josh Bicknell – drums, vocals

Chalk up another one for Andy Gesner. This guru of Jersey indie-rock – now fighting the good fight with his grassroots promotional organization, Artist Amplification - has a long list of Jersey bands that he's discovered and helped promote, from Evelyn Forever to Ben Trovato to Little T & One Track Mike. But with Double Breasted, Andy's hit the mother lode – an orchestral indie pop band comprised of harp, cello, and drums.

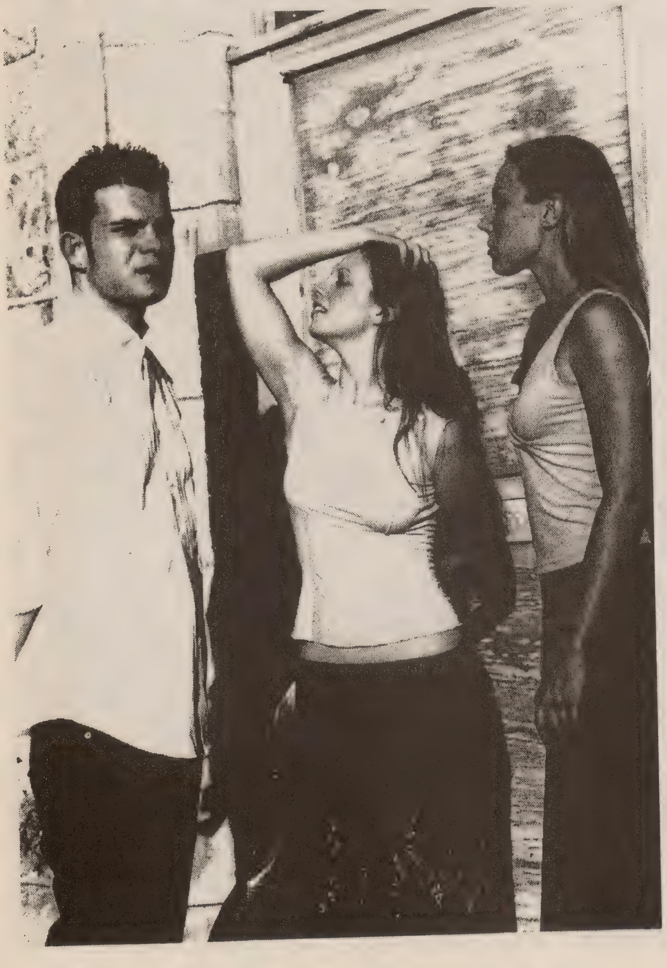
In the months since its inception, this unlikely, otherworldly trio has been charming audiences from New Brunswick to Williamsburg, although the members originally met at The College of New Jersey (formerly Trenton State College), where they all majored in music. On a balmy night in August, Andy made us all pasta and then I got to chew the fat with Ardith, Kristy, and Josh.

Q: Let's start with the obvious question: Harp, cello, drums. How in the world did that combination become an indie rock band?

Ardith - This was all really Kristy's brainchild. She always knew what she wanted.

Kristy – I had this idea before I even started college of having rock harp. And so when I got to the College of New Jersey, they had these Wednesday recitals, and sometimes they have these mock recitals where you don't have to play any classical music. So I did a Jewel cover, and Ardith was like, 'that was really cool.' And I was like, 'Yeah, I want to do harp, cello, and drums all together, I think that would sound really cool. It would be a great mix. We could play in coffeeshops.'

here's where the strings come in



Ardith: And I just said, 'No!' And that was almost three years ago. At the time, I was playing with a band that gave me a lot of insight into playing with band, and then I stopped with them and I met Alfonso (Velez,) and I started playing with him. And that's how I met Josh, when I started playing with Alfonso. And then Kristy came back asking us to play with her again, but Josh and I were both busy doing all this other stuff.

Kristy: We did jam once. We just got together and played whatever, and I was like, 'That was GREAT!' and everyone else was like, 'No, that's just too weird.' And then years later, it happened.

Ardith: But Kristy was always really supportive. She would come and watch us play with Alfonso.

Q: Josh, what were you doing before college? I bet there's a metal band or a punk band hidden somewhere in your past.

Josh: I was in a hard rock band for four years or so. All through high school. We tried to stay together when I went to college but it just kind of fell apart.

Kristy: Josh was a secret rocker. Then he went to college and went classical.

Josh: I just majored in music because that's what I love and what I wanted to do. My mom started me with drums in the third grade.

Q: So Josh and Ardith had played in bands, and Kristy, you just wanted to be in a band.

Kristy: Yeah. I love being in the spotlight. I'm a karaoke addict too. I had my own radio show when I was 6 years old. My mom didn't let me watch TV when I was little so I had to entertain myself, so I had a microphone and a tape recorder and my record player, and I made my own show. I've always been into the entertainment thing. So I was the one who kept pressing Ardith and Josh to do a band.

Q: The question that springs to mind is, if you always wanted to be a star, how did you wind up playing the harp? There really aren't a lot of rock divas on harp.

Kristy: (laughs) No, there aren't. I've been in music since I was very little, I started singing in church when I was in kindergarten. So I was in church a lot, and one day there was a harpist. And I was this little kid who saw the harp and I just wanted to play the harp. And my mom was like, where are we going to get a harp? Well, it turned out the harpist who played our church was a teacher, so I started taking private lessons. I liked doing something that was different, so that's why I became a harpist. When you think about it, that puts you even more in the spotlight, when you're doing something completely different from everybody else.

Q: Which brings us to February 28, 2002, the fateful day when Double Breasted became a band. So how exactly did that happen?

Ardith: I had just met up with this old friend, and we decided to go out for sushi. And I thought, Kristy would be fun to go out for sushi with. So we all met up and we had sushi, and then we went back to the music room at school, and we started messing around. And I heard what we could do with the harp and the cello, and I decided Kristy had been right all along and we could make this a band.

Kristy: We got to the music room and I said, 'Ardith, I wrote a song!' And I played "Unrequited" for her for the first time. Ardith was going through some rocky waters with the Alfonso Velez Band, so this offered a creative outlet. And when she saw that I could write a song, she figured that she could write songs for this band too. And that's when we decided we were going to be a band.

Ardith: When Kristy told us that we were going to be a band, she said that we'd be able to play the Sweet Dreams Café. And I said, well... okay, I'll do this, but only if we can play Maxwells.

Kristy: And I just never thought that would happen. I couldn't imagine our sound fitting into a bar scene. I didn't know how I could amplify the harp, and I didn't see how we could make the songwriting fit into a rock n roll style, since we all have classical backgrounds. So we were going to be a band that only played coffee houses and art spaces and things like that.

Q: And obviously something happened that changed all that.

Ardith: I was lost in New Brunswick. I was looking for this place called The Phoenician Bakery, which makes the best pita bread in the world. And I was driving all over and I couldn't find it, looking in phone books and calling people, so finally I called Andy (Gesner.) And while I was talking to Andy, I mentioned that I was going to be playing in this new band. And Andy was very intrigued when I said it was going to be harp, cello, and drums.

Kristy: I had met Andy at Alfonso Velez shows but I didn't really know him.

Ardith: So Andy asked when he could come and see us, so I said, okay, come this weekend. At that point, we had one song and we hadn't even played with Josh yet. So we got together a practice, and Josh turned up late, but he still go there ahead of Andy. And by the time Andy showed up, we had "Unrequited," "Heinz Ketchup," and "Unresolved."

Kristy: You should hear the tape of that session. We could actually play it for you but we might have to kill you afterwards. (laughs)

Ardith: But that's how it happened. How did we hook you in, Josh?

Josh: I think you called me on Friday and told me that Andy was coming down on Saturday and we had to play for him.

Q: Were you at all dubious when you found out you were going to be in a band with harp, cello, and drums?

Josh: Well, Kristy had mentioned it to me, and we had jammed that one time. And then I remember both of them coming up to me and Ardith going, 'it's really going to happen, we have a song!' So I got to this rehearsal, and there was no drum set. Someone else was using the regular drumset so I had to put together this really weird kit with whatever drums we could find. I think I played with my hands because we had no amplification. I just remember Andy's reaction. I was totally in shock that anyone would like this.

Kristy: We were pretending that we had been playing together for weeks, whereas in reality Josh had just gotten there and we had been playing for 15 minutes. And Andy was going, 'This is GREAT!' and we were like '*what?'* So then he offered us a show. Actually, he offered us two shows, and the first one was during my recital at school so we couldn't do it, so we took the second show. And it turned out to be at Maxwells. And I was all naïve, like, 'What's Maxwells? Okay. We'll see what happens.'

Q: There's actually a long history of very cool bands who got to play their first gig at Maxwells, like Yo La Tengo, for instance.

Ardith: And we went from Maxwells to the Court Tavern and then back to the College of New Jersey.

Q: Where did the Heinz ketchup song come from?

Ardith: It's a song full of anger and rage. With a candy-coated sugariness. There was a guy who said he liked me, but I don't think he really did. And he made fun of the shirt I was wearing at one point, and I thought it was a really cool shirt. But he poked fun at it and said that his ex-girlfriend had a really cool shirt and he was very proud because in the dissolving of their relationship, he got the shirt. And then he wore it the next day, and it was a Heinz ketchup shirt. And I was like, 'thanks a lot.' Yeah, Heinz ketchup. So the song is just about Kristy and myself getting dumped for younger girls, like a slap in the face. So all the blood can be cleaned up with Shout. It's a very simple concept. *[Editor's note: I didn't understand that either.]*

Q: Had you had much songwriting experience?

Kristy: All the songs we wrote for our first record are the first songs we ever wrote. "Unrequited" was my very first song that I had ever written.

Q: That's probably a good thing. If you did have an extensive songwriting background, you would have know it was impossible to write songs for cello, drums, and harp.

Ardith: Exactly. And I think having a classical music background was almost necessary, because it gave us an understanding of orchestration

Q: What are the challenges of writing songs for your lineup?

Kristy: Well, the drums. The drum set is so loud. A lot of people might say our sound is thin, but it almost has to be that way, because having a harp as a lead instrument, you're not going to hear it if there's a big full sound. I think even a lot of classical composers don't know how to write for harp. So we have to be aware of what our instruments are, and what our levels can go to; it might come across as thin, but it's just so you can actually hear what the instruments are playing. You're not just watching me move my fingers and not hearing anything.

Josh: I think it makes for good contrasts. This is as quiet as I've ever played. And then once we get some parts where Ardith kicks on the distortion pedal and we get louder, and it really makes a difference. It makes the powerful parts even more powerful because we're so quiet most of the time.

Ardith: I don't really see it as a challenge, though. It's the only thing I know.

Kristy: The challenge is getting the audience used to it, because everyone's ears are so trained to that rock guitar sound that when you hear our mixture of instruments, you think., 'oh, that's so weak,' because you're so brainwashed into thinking that electric guitar is the only sound that can work in rock music. With all acoustic instruments, we really have to write in a way that makes the instruments sound powerful, but without them being plugged in.

Ardith: It's funny, because I was the first to say "This is really going to happen,' and then a week later, I got really scared because I heard our first tape and it sounded to thin to me.

Kristy: And I had to tell her, it's okay, Ardith, we're a different sound. It's okay for us to be different. A lot of people say, why don't you add other instruments? And I think they ask that because they're so used to hearing full in your face music. And there's nothing else like us out there yet. But if bands were constantly made of harp, cello, and drums and then someone came in with electric guitars, you'd get the opposite reaction, people would say, 'Whoa! That's too much!'

Josh: We don't want to be a gimmick band either. If we added a full time guitarist and bass, we'd just sound like every other rock band but we'd be 'that band with those two girls,' and it'd be like the harp and cello were just there for show. But we're not trying to stick out as a novelty, we're trying to make our own artistic statement.

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angst for the mammaries

DOUBLE-BREASTED - *Angst for the Mammaries* (Artist Amplification; www.double-breasted.com)

Despite the undeniable excellence of the Double-Breasted project and the intelligence of everybody involved, I was expecting substantial difficulty in translating the energy and charisma of the group's performances to disc. Strings are notoriously difficult to record, and I can easily imagine the astonished and bewildered look on the face of the studio engineer when Kristi Chmura hauled her enormous harp into the live room.

But I guess it wasn't that way at all – despite the ridiculous title, *Angst for the Mammaries* turns out to be a completely natural and entirely successful documentation of the sound and attitude of New Jersey's indie group of the moment. The interplay between Chmura's arch-seriousness and the riotous, hyperstylized approach of cellist Ardith Collins keeps the group far from the twin chamber-pop sandtraps of highbrow cliché and self-dramatizing schtick, and the seven-song EP is paced accordingly, with the two women alternating songs and lead performances, each framing and elaborating the efforts of her partner. I can't think of another area group with two writers and singers who complement each other so well. Consequently, *Angst for the Mammaries* functions best when understood as a complete work rather than a collection of highlights.

But hey, if it's highlights you're looking for, rest assured that you'll find some here. Personally, I'm most drawn to Collins's alternately loopy and outraged performances, delivered in a clipped, poised, vaguely aristocratic voice that is heavy on severe consonants and breathless imperiousness; "The Ketchup Song" and "Alto Cinco" are wide-eyed, uproarious, straddling satire and condemnation with assurance.

Chmura's vision tends to be darker and more theatrical; still and crystalline, "Unrequited" carries a yearning that never becomes maudlin. On "Unresolved", the collection's opening track, the two singers raise their voices together to dazzling effect – simultaneously chastising and celebratory, gleeful and desperate, straining toward resolution and union. The Tori Amos crowd will inevitably go crazy for this. Doubtless you are not part of the Tori Amos crowd (and who can blame you?), but you ought to pick up on it too.

While much of local independent rock slowly strangles itself to death on its own conservatism, here is a group that manages to invert many of our most epidemic problems. Rather than bury their words beneath a barrier of frequency-spectrum-saturating rhythm guitar, Double-Breasted bravely foregrounds their formidable and illuminating lyricism. While so many Jersey singers both male and female do their level best to mimic the inflections of Eddie Vedder or Dave Matthews, Double-Breasted offers two unique and personal voices, recorded with clarity and care.

Here, also, proceeding with good humor, irony, and logic despite the current fashion for poker-faced expressions of brain-dead sincerity, is a group with strikingly unusual arrangement concpt – a cultivated clearing in an enormous forest of indistinguishable pop-punk and emo bands. But perhaps most importantly, in a rock scene where female voices are rare to non-existent, Double-Breasted features two outspoken and articulate women, rupturing by their very presence the easy, endless homosocial flow of boy after boy in guitar band after guitar band. It seems almost too manifest to say it, but I'll say it anyway: Collins and Chmura have supplied precisely what New Jersey independent music needs, and not a moment too soon.

Here's hoping we can all recognize that.

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DRAGPIPE

rock 'n' roll is back, baby

By Josh Davidson

Rock 'n' roll is clearly looking for a new direction.

South Jersey's Dragpipe, who made their major label debut this summer, think that they may be it.

"When I was in San Francisco, (ex-Metallica bassist) Jason Newsted told me that every ten years, there's a movement," singer Jai Diablo said, a familiar face to Jersey metalheads from his days in Asbury Park's hardcore headbangers Stem. Now, says Jai, he and Dragpipe hope they're going to be in the vanguard of a new movement to restore rock n' roll attitude.

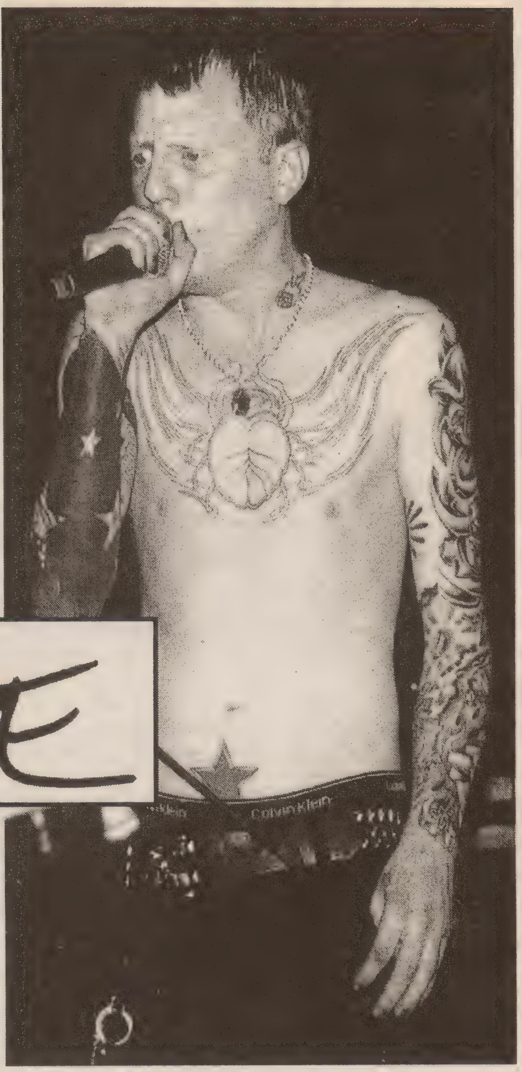
"We made a real classic record," Diablo said of their Interscope debut, *Music for the Last Day of Your Life*. "It's definitely going to be an in-the-old-bar-jukebox type of record."

"That's what we do, we're all about attitude for sure," bassist Jeno said. Specifically, Dragpipe's live show brings back the type of pure attitude missing from today's pretty-boy punk and suburban rap.

"Everything got lame I think," Diablo said. "Everyone's too serious now. I think the whole fun of its gone away." Dragpipe has more of a we-are-what-we-are than we-are-what-we-think-we-are attitude. Music from their August 27 release does not sell anything to the listener. It's just six musicians expressing the emotions inside them, worrying more about staying true than selling out.

"We come to make music where the whole chemistry is just what is," Jeno said. "It's just way over the top, that's for sure."

The band manages to retain its sensibility with a three guitar style that makes use of well layered riffs. Many times, one of their guitar players will play an *a capella* single-note motif, only to be followed by thunderous power chording by the other two. This call and response method is key to Dragpipe's inventiveness.



The music is usually created first, Diablo said. "It all stems from a riff," Diablo said. "(Our guitar players) will put together a riff and then another riff. Basically, the music comes first and the lyrics second. Nine out of 10 times, it's the music, then the lyrics."

"These guys kind of each know their parts," Jeno said. "They know each others' influences and come together." It all comes together to create an explosive wall-of-sound guitar presence, he said. "It's like Tourette's," added Diablo.

Music is one avenue Dragpipe looks to travel in restoring true rock spirit, but they also focus on image. Rap rock, they feel, is dying out; Diablo personally stopped doing rap rock when he was in his previous band, Stem. He does think Linkin Park is an amazing band, and he also likes System of a Down. But it's bands like the Hives and the White Stripes who are bringing back the attitude, Diablo said. "I missed the feel, I missed rock n' roll," he said. "The true Iggy Pop, Metallica. I miss the attitude. The true rock star shit. A lot of bands (now) play in t-shirts. Where's the effort in that?"

""I think the bands you see now are kind of what you are going to see coming out," Jeno said. "When we play, people know we're there. A lot of this new stuff lacks attitude and vigor." In fact, Dragpipe's shows are said to be rowdy, sometimes with objects thrown or broken or other crazy antics.

The band's sound is made up of the gentle, but high volume guitar riffs of Richie Garcia, Gino Depinto and Monte; smooth, massaging bass lines; and the complex but rock steady drum beats of Pete Barrera. Diablo's vocals are razor sharp, with coloring and embellishing screeches. Underneath the mayhem is well-planned song structure, with hooks that are made memorable by Diablo's delivery. True meaning can also be found under its circus thrash.

Dragpipe has listens to a wide range of music. Jeno listed his influences as Charles Mingus, John Coltrane and Miles Davis. It doesn't end there. "In my car, I have this double disc of Gang Starr," he said. "I can't stop listening to it." The band also listens to hip-hop and many other styles. "I like a lot of jazz, latin and blues," Jeno said. "I am big into jazz." "All of us are huge Refused fans," Diablo said. "Most of the other guys are into Black Sabbath, Jane's Addiction and Motorhead. Pete, our drummer, is into a lot of older death metal and latin music."

The band is as original musically as it is in appearance. Each member takes their own signature style, blending it together to create one big sound. They build strong heavy arrangements over a straight-ahead rock foundation. "For the most part, we're a straight ahead, in your face, kind of band," Jeno said. The band mostly sticks to 4/4 timing, layering the groove with its stringed instruments.

Diablo's lyrics are conversational, easy to relate to, and inventive. "My lyrics are everything from not wanting to deal with schedule patterns and there's a lot of girlfriend, relationship stuff," he said. "We call our music gasoline rock." Writers such as Hunter S. Thompson influence Diablo. "It's poetry, but its poetry in motion," he said.

The band formed in 1999. After playing for six months, they recorded a demo in Hoboken. They first drew a buzz by building a big NYC following. "We did it basically from word of mouth," Jeno said. "Going out to shows, hanging out with all the bands and handing out fliers letting people know we were playing." The band came close to selling out New York's Irving Plaza a few months ago, Diablo said. After establishing a presence in New York City and getting K-Rock airplay, they found a lawyer. Labels eventually started bidding on the band and they chose Interscope. "The vibe over there was amazing," Diablo said.

The band spoke with Newstead about producing their new release. He however was forming a new band called EchoBrain so he didn't have the time. Twiggy from Marilyn Manson did pre-production and Dave Sardy (Slayer, Marilyn Manson, Helmet, Barkmarket) produced the album. Getting signed has helped draw the New Jersey band's concentration only to its music. Not being able to afford good equipment, or the hassle of setting up shows, is no longer on their minds.

"It's just been easier to do, because now we have the money," Diablo said.

They did their first tour with Monster Magnet, then toured with Sevendust. After that, they did the Local Bazooka Tour with Sevendust and Filter. They then toured Germany with Filter. The album debuted as the fifth most added record on radio, Jeno said.

Things just kind of happen quick," Jeno said. "So its hard to tell what we're doing next month."

Hopefully, helping to start a new movement.

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Planet Janet: Back To The Future

By Josh Davidson

Sarah Fire: vocals, guitar, keyboard
Jared Sousa: guitar
Jason Nixon: bass
Miranda Taylor: drums

Planet Janet digs deep into rock's past and may become a band of its future. Their glittery rock-star anthems get to the point and stay in the mind, with songs that build off jumpy, mood-swinging drumbeats, powerful crunch-guitar chords, and down-to-earth lyrics. Abrupt tempo changes make vocalist/guitarist/songwriter Sarah Fire's lyrics meaningful and picturesque.

Instrumentally, the band gives off a California surf vibe with a New York strut. Boppy guitar riffs and drumbeats often give way to chords you could only hear in CBGB's. This complements the ups and downs in Fire's piquant, personable lyrics.

Fire's sunny vocals grab much attention on their debut CD, *Nice Socks*. She digs deep into her vocal chords and emotional palette to build a variety of song melodies. Her guitar play with Jared Sousa is unrestrained and raw, as Sousa's glides and slick, grimey arpeggios pour into a two-guitar chord attack. Bassist Jason Nixon and drummer Miranda Taylor keep a sensible but spontaneous rhythm. Taylor drums with authority and thought, while Nixon adds feel and color. The band has worked to create its own sound, stamping itself to uniquely structured songs.

Fire mixes earthy verses with outer space bridges invoking the spirit of both 60's psychedelia and 70's glam rock. Last year, the band's entrance into the Jersey shore scene earned them two Asbury Music Awards, one for Best Young Band and another for Sarah Fire as Best Female Vocalist. Today, this still-new band seems to have what it takes to create with maturity and awareness of each other's musical abilities, as they continue to write, practice and play out together with a sincerity that can only lead to positive results.

Q: First off, a little bit of background. How did you guys form and what year?

Sarah Fire: Miranda and I started playing acoustically in '98. So, it was just acoustic for a while and Jared joined. We didn't really become this band that you see until Jay joined, about a year ago.

Jason Nixon: (I joined) last February, so it was a year and a couple of months.

Jared Sousa: I was on bass, until Jay joined, and then I moved to guitar.

Q: What kind of music were you listening to?

Sarah: I think everybody was into different things.

Miranda Taylor: I think Led Zeppelin is what I was listening to the most.

Sarah: I was listening to Weezer a lot.

Jason: When I joined, last year, I was listening to Devo.

Q: So there's kind of a common denominator?

Sarah: And the Pixies…

Jared: The Pixies is probably the biggest common influence that we all have, and the Beatles.

Q: So, other than punk, do you have a lot of straight-ahead rock influences?

Sarah: I think straight-ahead rock is probably the closest. Because, I feel like saying punk is like a little, too... That's just Jared, like Jared listened to a lot of the Ramones. But, I never really listened to a lot of punk rock. I was always into a lot of classic, the Beatles. Then, more Weezer, they're not very punk rock.

Jason: And of course Zeppelin...

Sarah (laughs): Of course, Zeppelin.

Q: How do you kind of meld those styles together? Have your styles changed since you first started out?

Jared: I had gotten more into artists like Weezer and Radiohead than I had been before. And that's kind of cool, actually, how they make guitar parts and such and try to supply it to the song. Plus, using what I like about rock n' roll music. Johnny Thunders and the Ramones do the same thing. That's at least how I do it with my instrument.

Sarah: I think a lot of the bands I was listening to then have matured themselves. Like, Radiohead, to go from Pablo Honey to like fucking Amnesiac or something. I mean, that is, like they're two different bands you know. They are my favorite band. I definitely saw them progress. I think I was influenced by, aspiring towards more than just a three-chord pop song.
But, of course, that's something that I'll always like and it's something you still can get away with, if you're smart about it.
It's an aspiration. When you see Thom Yorke as a songwriter, I did at least, he's always been my idol.

Q: How has your music changed and developed?

Jared: It's matured a lot. And, Sarah always wrote good pop songs. Then it gradually went to stuff that got more complex. And then we finally melded the more complex interesting songs with the pure, pop songs. Until, what we have now.

Jason: We have like epic rock. (laughter) Epic rock anthems.

Jared: We try to meld together our two advancing techniques. We're not necessarily super advanced musicians. But, we think arrangement wise, we've advanced a lot.

Sarah. And I think the emphasis on energy and like just rocking as hard as we can has come into play more often now than it used to. We used to be like, how in tune are we? (laughter) We used to suck so hard. In fact, right now is the only time I would be proud of how we play live. We always had the ideas and the songs, but not live. We sucked and being in tune was very important, because it was about the only thing we could depend on. (laughter)

Miranda: We've been more comfortably lately. Comfortable on stage, so that the rock element can shine through.

Sarah: Our music has changed in that what Miranda and I were doing was much more stripped down. Very minimalist, very melodically based stuff. Now we're more interested in being a rock band, utilizing four people. I mean, I play keyboard and guitar and it's like we're really trying to get as much sound in the songs as possible.

Q: Do you put riffs in the newer songs you write?

Jared: Yeah. The two guitars never play the same thing anymore. Not that they were ever.

Sarah: We added another guitar and we were still playing the same stuff. And then we were like, 'Ok, if it's two guitars, lets make sure that we're not both playing the same thing.'

Q: How do you decide who's going to play what in the guitar parts?

Sarah: It depends on how the song is written. Because, I'll write a riff sometimes like on "Heart." I'll write a guitar part, a riff or whatever and then Jared will usually write a solo or write a part that goes with that. It's very collaborative.

Jared: We very often work together on the songs, me and Sarah, and go over them. Sort of like, get the whole structure down, and bring them to practice. At least recently, that's

tired of doing it alone?

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what we've been doing. It works better that way. Rather than trying to come together with the whole band, all trying to figure out parts at once.

Q: Who writes most of the material, the actual words and the song itself?

Sarah: I write the words, the music and the guitar parts. Which is what I've heard a lot of bands do. Like Thom Yorke does that. I bring it to the band and then we make a song.

Q: How do the songs change from when you're first playing them on acoustic guitar? How do they sound when the band takes them?

Sarah: Sometimes, they don't change very much and sometimes they change completely. Lately, and I think this speaks for the maturity of the band, they've been changing a lot. Not so much that I wrote a crappy song and we made it good. There's a song structure and we take it from A to Z and make it into a real song. The tempo changes, we pay attention to the parts of the song in a much more conscienscious way. And the result is, I think everyone feels like they put something into the song, where it's not just me going, 'These are the chords, this how you should play it, that's it.' That's never how it is.

Jason: It definitely speaks for song structure maturity when a song changes from when you just have the basis, when Sarah writes it, to when you have the full band a lot. Because it's like, when you have a simple pop song and you bring it to the band, it's not going to change a lot. It doesn't make it a bad song. But when it has its own complexities and everyone has a different take on it, it's just open to more interpretation when you have just more complex arrangements.

Q: What do you guys try to add when you get the songs?

Jared: Sometimes me and Sarah go and sit on a bed and play over it and I'll just try to come up with stuff. Or, I'll just get a tape of it down and do it by myself. I usually do everything in like a five or 10-minute period.

Sarah: It's always Miranda who makes it, because she's the drummer. So, it takes it from being like an acoustic song, to a rock song. So when she starts playing for me, when I write sometimes I go like this (plays drum beat on her leg) and that's how I write often. I just sing and I'll just tap on a desk. Make a rhythm, because that's what makes it a rock song to me. Miranda, for me, really starts to help me take a song to a realm of where I'm like, 'Ok, I can hear this song being played as a rock song.' You know, because your singing and playing an acoustic guitar, it really doesn't sound like a rock song.

Q: Do you guys play more for the song or more just to add something musically to it?

Miranda: I usually think about what the song reminds me of and try to rip off that drummer. (Laughter)

Sarah: And that usually works pretty well. No one seems to notice.

Jason: I try to accent both Miranda and the guitars. Do a middleman thing where it's like I am trying to complement both the melody and the rhythm, which is my job as a bass player.

Q: What do you write about lyrically?

Sarah: I usually write about relationships, which is boring. I write about whatever is happening to me in my life. I write part about becoming rock starts. Usually things that I feel passionately about. I never sat down to write a song and said, 'Sure, I want to write a song about driving.' (laughter) I've never been one to sit down and write a song for the sole purpose of writing a song. It's usually really a function of, if I'm in a bad mood, I usually write. Usually, it's a melodic thing with me. It's not like a chord change thing. It's like a melody that I want to use.

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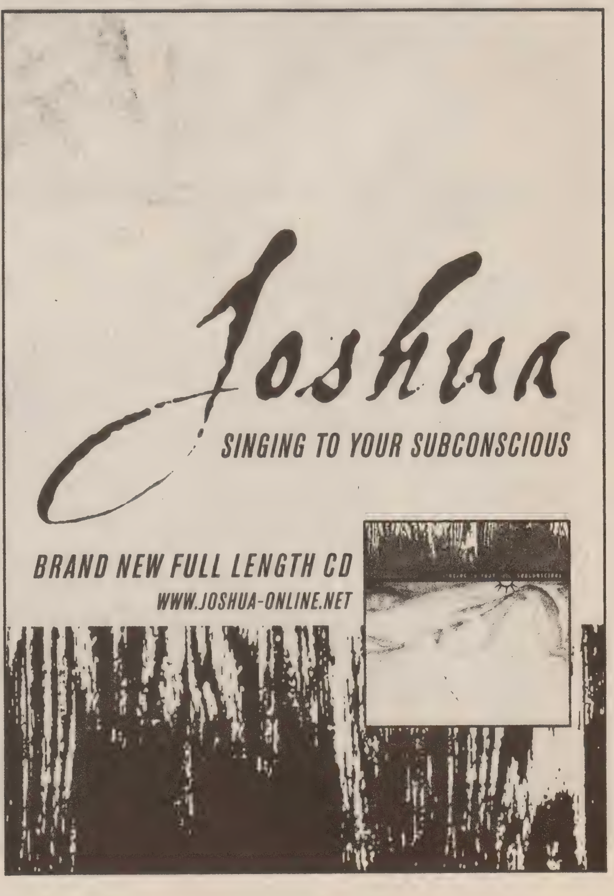

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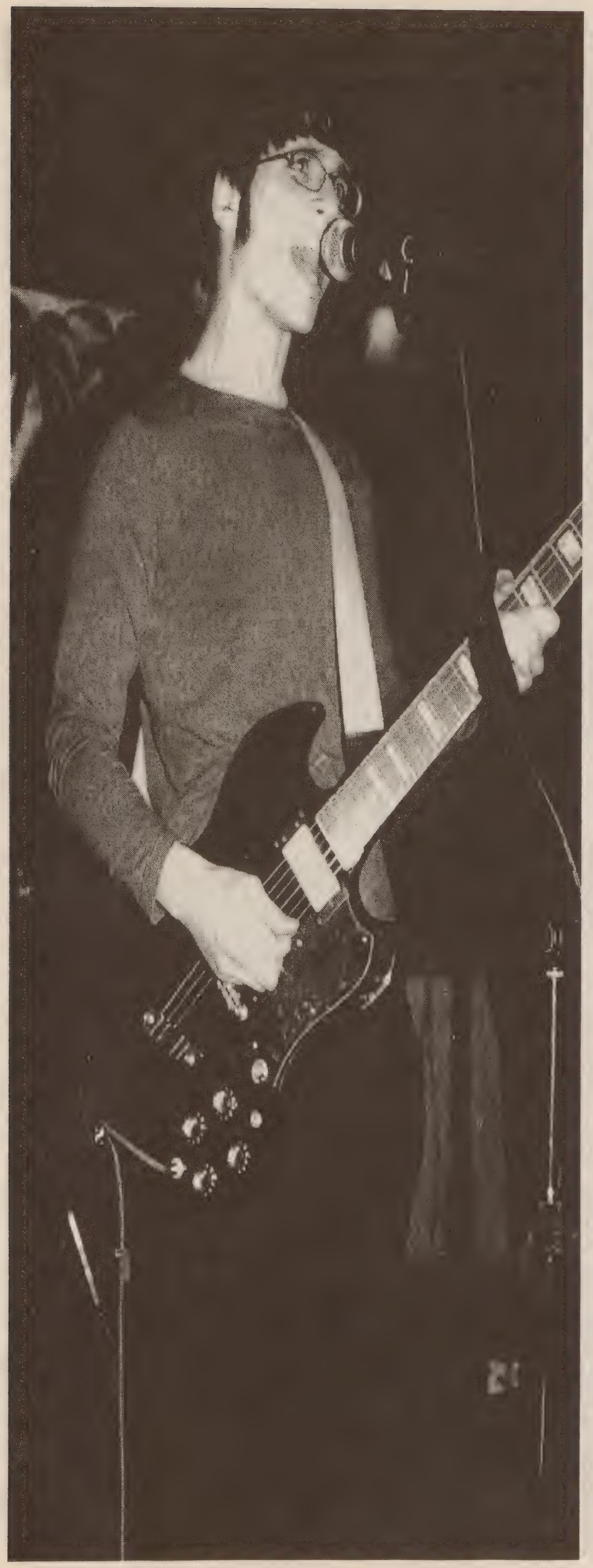


HERO PATTERN

Ready To Rock You

By Jim Testa

Jay Kundrath - vocals, guitar
Pete Marceau - guitar
Rob Fitzgerald - bass
Mike Kundrath - drums

Along with Small A.M., Planet Janet, double-breasted, Val Emmich, and Copperpot, to name just a few, Hero Pattern represent the first generation of Jersey bands for the new millennium.... bands that, at least in their current configuration, don't really have a history in the Nineties. They're young, therefore they rock; but do they have anything to say? We sat down with the band before a show at Maxwells early this summer and found out.

Q: The story of this band really begins with Nebulous Thoughts, a trio that played around New Brunswick for a few years. What was the impetus for changing the name?

Jay: It really wasn't so much a name change. We more or less just became a different band. Rob and I were in Nebulous Thoughts for five or six years, all the way back to high school. To make a long story short, we parted ways with our drummer and we weren't planning on stopping. We had a gig lined up the day after our drummer left, so I turned to my brother Mike as a temporary fill-in.

We had played before with other drummers but it just hadn't meshed. So we turned to Mike and at that time, we had studio time booked .

Rob and I talked Pete into coming into the studio with us. So in a very short time, we came together as a band, supposedly just for this recording project. And we decided that the four of us played really well together, so we decided to stay together. We continued under the name Nebulous Thoughts for a while, but we had gotten some criticism about the name, which made us think, but also we were thinking that we really were a different band by this time. Nebulous Thoughts had a lot of history and baggage that we wanted to shed, so we decided that since we were starting over with new members, we'd have a new name.

What really happened was a complete renewal of energy, and rediscovery of the joy of music that was completely alien to Rob and myself, because the last few months of Nebulous Thoughts had been dreadful. It was just a nice kick in the ass.

Pete: I had played a couple of shows with Nebulous Thoughts towards the end and I don't recall us doing a lot of new material. By the time we were recording the record that came out as the Hero Pattern, basically we had written an entire new set.

Jay: I was constantly writing songs throughout, but I didn't really feel confident in taking them to the band, because I didn't think we could pull them off. To be completely honest, the dynamics within Nebulous Thoughts were just not positive. And there was a lack of communication between the three of us. You couldn't really express ideas at practice. There was a kind of stand-off attitude. And then drum-wise, it went from someone that I couldn't even communicate with, to my flesh and blood brother, who I can communicate with by just a look. It was polar opposites. A lot of the time, at the end of Nebulous Thoughts, I would take my new songs home and just practice them in the basement with my brother and fantasize about us having a new band together. Sometimes even Rob would play with us and one time, Rob said to me, Did you ever think that maybe we're prepping Michael for what might be coming in the future? So it was just a really beautiful turn of events.

Q: Jay, there's something I always wanted to ask you. I saw Nebulous Thoughts a bunch of times and it was only when your CD came out and I read the lyric sheet that I realized there was a lot of religious content in the songs.

Jay: When I was younger - and Nebulous Thoughts came along in the heyday of all that - I was definitely more intensely... I wouldn't say religious. It wasn't so much religion as a lot of spiritual questions. And that definitely still fuels a lot of what I do. Just a lot of existential angst and a 'what the hell is going on?' vibe. Just a lot of confusion. It's really not a preachy vibe, just me trying to figure out where I fit in the universe.

Q: That's what was so unusual. I wouldn't even use the term Christian rock band, because you didn't take it that far, but when you do think of born-again rockers, what comes with that is shoving the message down your throat. The whole evangelical thing, which is a major part of that religion. And that was never part of what you did.

Jay: It was always my concern not to turn people off. The worst thing you can do if you have a message - and it's really questionable what the message is - is to turn people off, to just shut them down because you're coming on too strong.

Rob: I don't think it was necessarily something that was meant to be told to other people. It was a very personal thing that Jay was going through and trying to work out in his lyrics.

Q: So how were those songs different from what you're writing now?

Jay: When I was younger, my writing was more intense, and it was more spiritually fueled. All I ever wrote about was that. And now I have a much wider palette to choose from. Now I'm more interested in human things, not just spiritual things. There are other things that are important to write about, because there are other things that are important to living and breathing. That need to be addressed. Like girls.

Pete: That's what I was going to say, just being on the outside of all that. Your approach has become more universal.

Rob: The nicest thing about it, from the bandmate point of view, is that when a song had a certain meaning to it, it was associated with the entire band. So if Jay says one thing, everyone kinda assumes the whole band is that way. When people hear anything with even a slightly religious reference, they freak and they hate the band immediately, because that's the way Christian music is viewed by mainstream society. People get shut off by it. And being in the band, you're don't necessarily share everything that's going on, but people still associate it with you. But that happens a lot less when the songs are about other things.

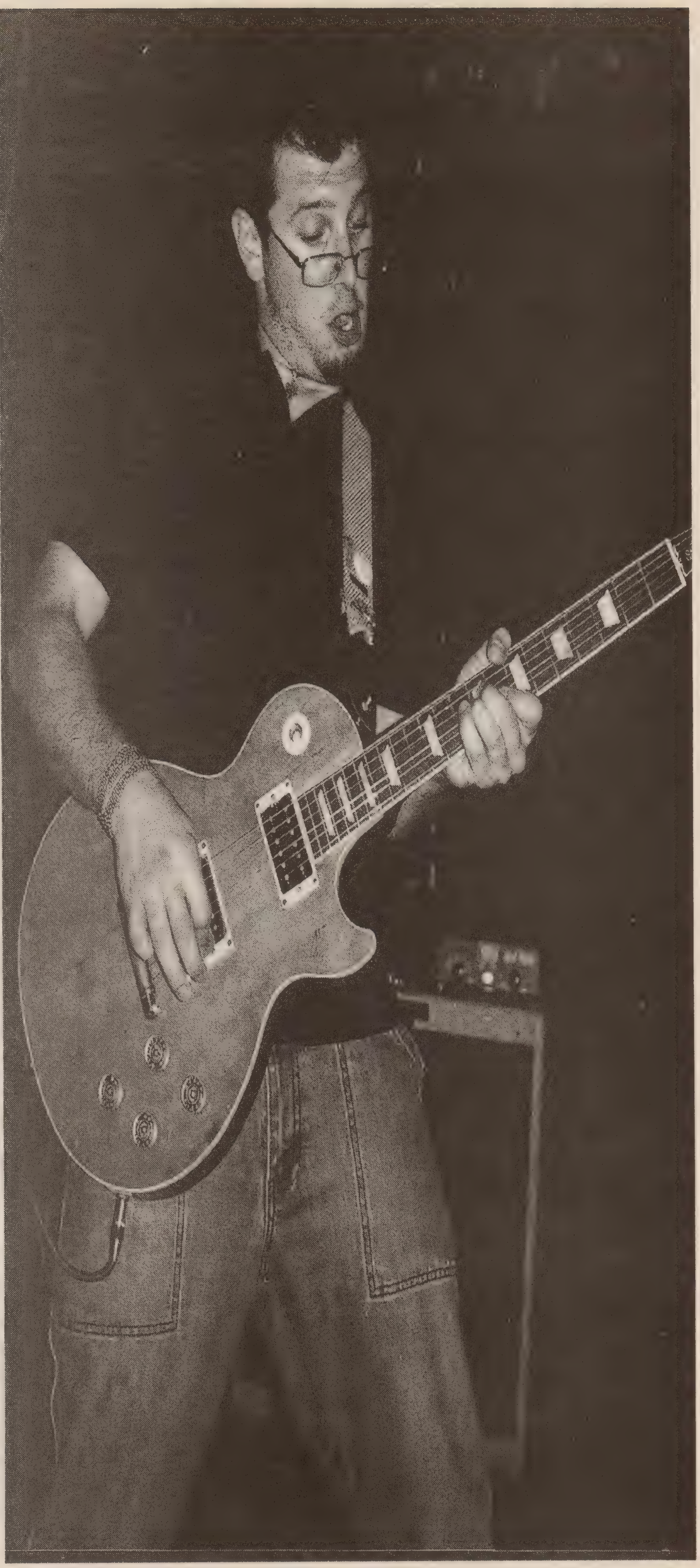
Q: Do you also think that the fact that you've gone through a lot of personal changes - you finished college, you're an adult now - has changed your approach to songwriting?

Jay: I definitely think my education has expanded and broadened my views. You learn a lot about yourself and about other views in the world, like for instance, I mentioned the existentialists.

Rob: I also think your journalism major became an effective tool for you to use in communicating, in communicating with people, communicating with people in the band.

Jay: We're definitely not the Danielson Family. Christian music is not something that has anything to do with this band. Just musically, it's bad music. And it's just not something that you want to be associated with. The truth is that I am Christian and I am in a band. That does not make us a Christian band at all.

Rob: AMEN TO THAT! (laughs)



Q: Mike, you're not only the drummer, but you're also Jay's little brother. And Jay is a drummer himself, so he probably thinks he knows more than you do. So tell me, do you get picked on?

Mike: To an extent, I guess. I've known Rob my whole life too, and I've been friends with Pete a long time, so they've always picked on me a little bit too. But it's pretty cool.

Q: Usually when you've got two brothers in a band, there's a definite dynamic there and it usually involves a lot of fighting. Like you think of Oasis or the Kinks... So how do the two of you get along?

Mike: It's definitely a good thing that I'm in the band. I think we get along better now than we ever did.

Jay: When I went away to college, Mike was a typical snotty little brother.

Mike: We loved each other, but we HATED each other.

Jay: And then one summer, I came home from college and he had grown up, plus he had grown about three and a half feet, and all of a sudden he was my really cool brother. And he's since become the best friend I've ever had. In Nebulous Thoughts, the honeymoon was long over and we were all really frustrated. Mike had started a band in high school who were just show-stoppers. And I was just so impressed, and the seed was sown in my mind that eventually Mike would come over to our camp.

Rob: Which was not an easy sell for me. I did not want to be in a band with two brothers and be the third guy in the band. And I had a hard time getting over Mike being the 'little brother.' So we compromised and I agreed that Mike could join the band but I insisted that we get another guitar player, just to even things out. (laughs) But it turned out to be a really good idea.

Pete: The thing with Jay also being a drummer, and with Rob being a very good arranger, it's really working well for all of us. Mike is very open to constructive criticism, and yet he retains his identity very well. He isn't pig headed like a lot of drummers tend to be, he's perceptive and he'll listen to suggestions, and yet he brings a unique flavor to the band.

Jay: I couldn't be more happy with the personnel we have right now. Every once in a while, I have to sit back and thank God..

(laughter) Rob: Put that in quotes: "THANKS GOD"

Jay: ...for everybody I'm with. Everybody is so talented and everybody gets together, and it's such great communication. We can work on a song and there's no process within the band that we have to test. It's just nice to have a band that makes you happy, and have no reservations about anybody in the band in any way. I just hope that doesn't come off as being arrogant.
Rob: No, just pompous.

Q: I'll be honest, the first time I saw you as Hero Pattern, Mike was brand new in the band and he seemed a little nervous and uptight, and I wasn't sure if he was up to it. But then over the next couple of shows, it just got better and better. I remember calling Andy Gesner after one show and saying, "Have you seen these guys lately? They've gotten really GOOD."

Rob: Thank you!

Jay: (laughs) Let's talk about Andy for a minute. Andy is the patron saint of independent rock in New Jersey. I've said this before and I'll say it again, I would not be who I am with my music career if it weren't for Andy, and that's just a fact. Probably 95% of every show I've ever played - whether it was an Artist Amp show or just an Andy show at the Budapest Café or whatever - Andy was behind it somehow. He has been just such a champion to so many bands, including ours.

Pete: He has promoted a culture between the bands that is unparalleled anywhere else that I've every played. The support the bands give to one another, the exposure that we all generate for one another, it's amazing. And it's all this culture that Andy has generated.

Rob: We became such good friends with Val Emmich's band that we did a split EP.

Q: How did that happen?

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Jay: Val and I and Rob were at the Somerset Diner, just talking about where our careers were heading and how much respect we had for the scene here, and how much respect we had for each other. And I don't know who said it first, Val or me, but one of us came up with the idea.

Rob: We've become much tighter knit since he came back from his trip to L.A. and I started playing in his band. That really brought our two bands together and somebody just said one day, 'wouldn't it be cool if we did a split EP?'

Jay: That project came together faster than anything I've ever seen. I hold that CD in my hand and I think, 'it's HERE,' and I can't believe how quickly it happened.

Rob: It took us two and a half weeks to do the artwork, mastering, layout... I just think it's really, really cool because that's an indication of a good scene, when bands start working together.

Q: Are there any plans to do a full-length?

Jay: Absolutely. We're recording some demos right now and it's going well. We have a bunch of half-finished songs that we'd like to work out and finish, and then we'll go into the studio. We have no plans to slow down at this point, which is good.

Pete: Those songs on the split EP, plus one more song we recorded at the same session for the next Artist Amp comp, are really a snapshot of the band at that point. Michael and I officially joined the band at about 9 o'clock pm the night before we went into the studio. So it's a snapshot of the band from the very beginning to about three months into our evolution.

Q: What else have you talked about in terms of your situation right now? Do you want to try and get in a van and tour for a couple of weeks at a time? Or isn't that possible given work and school and whatever.

Jay: That is definitely on our list of things to do. Val Emmich and us always talk about making that a reality, and soon. As soon as the opportunity presents itself, we're going to make it happen.

Q: Mike, are you still in school?

Mike: I just graduated high school in June.

Rob: Now he's off to college and the seven-year plan like me and Pete. (laughs) Hopefully we'll never have to finish college.

Q: What else has been going on?

Rob: We did a show for this cable-access TV show called The Gig that was a lot of fun. The video of it was online at www.thegig.com but it might be down by the time this story gets to print.

Q: I've noticed at your last couple of shows that you've got some very enthusiastic fans. There are always a lot of girls yelling and screaming at Mike. (laughs)

Jay: Yeah, we've gotten some very good responses. I've noticed the registrations on our message board on our website too. Not that it's amazing but there do seem to be new people registering almost every day, which is great. We've got a lot of good response as the band continues to grow, so there's lot of votes of confidence coming from consumers, who seem to like the rock that we're producing.

Rob: And that we'll continue to produce, whether it's in an arena or a basement someplace.

Jay: Yes. For the rest of our lives.

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BLACK NASA

TODAY JERSEY CITY. TOMORROW THE COSMOS

by Kent Hassinger

Every night all across the country, guys are carrying cheap drums and cheap guitars and cases of cheap beer and bags of cheap grass into basements, garages, and ghetto rehearsal studios. They're looking for something. Maybe they go cause they want to get away from their girlfriends. Maybe they go because they don't have a girlfriend. Maybe they wanna forget their shitty jobs and their shitty cars and credit card bills. Or maybe they go because there is nothing they would rather do than lock themselves in an uncomfortably small room and simply breathe and live and feel and listen in the walls of their rock n roll.

Black Nasa is exactly this kind of band. They started as three blue-collar Jersey City guys getting together for late-night beer-drinkin pot-smokin get-down and jam sessions and they eventually said, "Let's take this out." Those are the best bands. Those are the honest ones, the ones you can trust.

"We knew each other. We always hung out at the same bars," recalls bassist/vocalist Chris Koznick, who used to play in the Atomic Bitchwax with Monster Magnet guitarist Ed Mundell. "We started playing together about two years ago and were called El Segundo." Adds slide guitarist-extraordinaire Duane Hutter, "Corey [Stubblefield-drums] and I have known each other since we were little. He was the first drummer I played with and I'm happy to be playing with him again." "Yeah, we used to play in my parent's basement all the time," Corey laughs. Drummers always have the coolest parents, but they're usually a little crazy from all the noise. "They got used to the it. We'd stop playing and hear their TV rattling the walls."

Duane Hutter's an original slidin' southern disciple, matched by none. There is an air of seriousness about him, especially when he's playing the get-back electric mud slide guitar the way he loves to do. Raised by wolves and the ghost of Duane Allman, his slide is an extension of his haircut. He switches between slide and straight playing seamlessly, even mid-riff, mid-solo. "No, it's not custom, it's just a slide," he laughs when asked about the type of slide he uses. "It's just the same kind I always use—it doesn't slide off my finger." He's the kind of guy who doesn't see anything wrong with citing Billy Gibbons, David Gilmour, and R.L. Burnside sidekick Kenny Brown as influences. Oh, and he sure likes that Brother Allman he was named after, too. He sounds like all of these guys when he points it out, but like none of them when you're on your own.

Pushing boundaries and refusing to acknowledge genres or scenes or rules of any kind is what the Black Nasa does. It's easy to say—or even assume—that this band with the singer/bass player from the Atomic Bitchwax is a gonna be another jammy stoner rock band. You could say that, and it wouldn't necessarily be wrong, but if you're expecting the Atomic Bitchwax Part 2, you will be sorely disappointed. Sure, you still get badass Chris Koznick yells and killer bass lines and a long-haired guitar player with lots of pedals and a hard-as-hell hitting drummer, but it's a new jam. The songs are shorter, for the most part. The emotional weight of the new sound is heavier, but in more of a paranoid Roger Waters way than a paranoid Tony Iommi way. Lots of delay and creepy slide guitar.

"A lot of it comes from jams," says Koznick about the spontaneous nature of writing a Black Nasa song. "Sometimes Chris will bring in an idea that he wants to work on and we'll jam and see what happens with it," adds Corey. Listening to Black Nasa gives the impression that these are three musicians who respect each other's talents and play exactly what they want to, and it naturally works itself out that no toes are stepped on.

Not to suggest that these guys are pretentious enough to make it a concept album, but the road theme is fairly ever-present on the album. They could call the album Road Songs and it wouldn't be the least bit awkward. Chris is the perfect spokesman for the road, 'cause he was actually born on the road in St. Louis, Missouri in 1972. Life's an endless tour for these guys, and this record is as close as most of us will ever get to the actual experience of road-life. Corey hasn't done the rock n roll touring thing yet, but Chris and Duane are both veterans of the road. "I used to play in band called Godspeed and we toured with Black Sabbath in Europe. It was right before Ozzy came back. I have a picture of me and Geezer Butler." Chris lights up like a little kid when he recalls meeting his hero, then goes on to make it quite clear that he plans on touring more with Black Nasa than he did with the Atomic Bitchwax. "I wanna go out and never come back," he deadpans. "The thing with Bitchwax was that Ed [Mundell, guitarist for Monster Magnet and the Atomic Bitchwax] really didn't have the time to play like I wanted to. It was just always tough because Ed has so much going on with the Magnet. They're busier than ever and stuff comes up when they're going on tour or when they're gonna go in the studio and record a song for a soundtrack, so we couldn't ever tour like I wanted to."

Never ones to kiss and tell, they are decidedly silent when it comes to the tales of roadhouse debauchery that so many bands like to brag about. Chris will admit to loving the "free drugs and loose women" that come with rock n roll success, but refuses to give up any details. "A lot of drunk stories," is the most he'll say. "A LOT of drunk stories," adds Duane. "They're all the same story, really."

All the guys wanna do is play, but barroom queens and hangers on keep wandering through their songs, tempting them with ruinous vices. We sit with the band at the bar, staring down trouble over the tops of our glasses, then watch them take a shot of cheap bourbon and invite the trouble over—just to see what happens. Anything to break up the mind-numbing monotony of pattern of the road—van, bar, floor. Van, bar, floor. Floor if you're lucky—'cause you ain't never been uncomfortable til you slept sitting up in a van with an amp in your lap and the drummer's stinking feet in your face. But this is the Black Nasa reality — what else would they write an album about?

Tear It Up

NJ's Rippin'est

Tear It Up is:
Dave-Vocals
Matt-Drums
Ryan- Bass
John-Guitar
Andy- Guitar

Interview and photos by Mike Ramek

Rising from the smoldering carcass that was Dead Nation, New Jersey's Tear It Up fuse an alloy of that previous incarnation's knack for gritty, sonic speed with a more diligent and complex assault of desperate, perturbed diatribes and musicianship, hearkening back to a distinct early '80s SST-era sound. A layered, especially accomplished knack for melodic underpinnings adds a singular angle to the succinct, tight outbursts of disgust and discontent that are inevitable byproducts of the failed relationships, suffocating loneliness, alienation, and interpersonal conflict and rejection that members of this band have struggled with.

The culmination of this adept hardcore punk fusion is a jolting, straight forward trouncing that is instantly both vital and brutal in an unadulterated fashion that transcends the gimmick-laden trappings of tuned down metal riffage and hip posturing prevalent in modern hardcore.

Within a relatively short span of time, the band has released an incredibly prolific catalogue of 7"s, splits, and two full lengths that showcase a furious aural aggression, while at the same time emphasizing an ever present *progression* in musical arrangement, structure, and lyrical content.

I interviewed Dave and Matt of Tear It Up outside ABC No Rio, where they were later to hammer out a melee of taut, explosive aural eruptions spanning their vast repertoire to a thoroughly crazed and incensed swarm of kids.

Q: The progression from Dead Nation to Tear It Up...when the 'Painless' EP was released, it seemed to mark a major change in direction. It was a departure from earlier straight up DRI style Dead Nation material, as it was far darker, far more layered, and more powerful than anything written before....could you talk about that release, trace the lineage from Dead Nation to early Tear It Up, and discuss the direction that the band is going in now?

Matt: The reason why the Painless record, the last Dead Nation 7", sounded the way it did was because we had newer kids in the band. The lineup for that record was me, Paul, and Dave, Matt [Suxx] and Doug. Up until that point, Matt [Suxx] was the main writer , arranger and producer...he basically gave you everything, and that was the way it was going to be. But when that record came out, we had kids who could *play.* Matt's guitar ability versus Paul's guitar ability was vastly different in the way they played....that helped shaped the sound of the record, because some of the things I'd ask Matt to do he couldn't do, but Paul *could,* because Paul could play better than he could. Also, me and Dave, and the other kids in the band got more of a say as to what we wanted to do with that record, instead of Matt just making it all his deal.

Dave: That record was written very quickly, put together very quickly. We talked to the guy from Kangaroo...he said he wanted us to do a 7", and two weeks later he's like "So when are you mailing it?", and we were like "I guess we've got to do this now." We put everything together very quick, and that's another reason why there was more input all around. Matt didn't have it all planned out.
It was a combined effort between four of the five people who started Tear It Up, and that carried over into that band.

Matt: It traced over to Tear It Up because everybody was helping to write the records, and in fact the early Tear It Up sessions were songs that I had saved up, that I was saving to do with another band, because I couldn't get my songs into Dead Nation, stuff that me and Pul had thrown together over a couple practices. Basically, with those practices we had the demo done.

Q: Focusing more specifically on Tear It Up, in light of the massive amount of material the band has released, how would you describe the lyrical and musical changes undergone within this relatively short span of time?

Matt: Well, musically the main progressions from the 7" up until the new LP....what we tried to do with the later releases was create an album-style atmosphere, where the songs flow together, and there is a reason and a purpose for one song being after another song, and the materiel generally fitting together the way that it does. We were new at that approach on the earlier records, but if you look at the new album now, everything fits, and I could give you a million reasons why *this* follows *that*, as opposed to a general idea about the musical flow on the first 7", or on the "Just Can't Stand It" LP, where we were just going for a more general, concurrent flow between the lyrics and ideas.

Dave: With a lot of the earlier songs, we tried to work them together, but we actually wrote songs on the LP with the initial intent of putting them together.

Q: On Nothing To Nothing, the new 12", there's certainly a greater degree of power and melody it seems, the guitar work is more intricate, more layered at times....

Matt: Well, musically, what we wanted to do on this new one was put together an actual *album*...if you look at a lot of hardcore and punk rock bands, they don't try to put together an album. Dave hates this example, but the Beatles, towards the end of their career, wrote albums to be albums, Led Zeppelin wrote albums to be albums, most punk band will just say "Well, we have these songs, and we're just going to put them on this record. Some of them fit nicely together, and others don't, but we wrote 'em, we recorded them, and we're gonna to throw it out." The Nothing To Nothing record was written together...I had an idea of how I wanted the entire record to go...I wrote a bunch of the songs, the skeletal outline of it, and I'd say "Paul, what kind of songs do you have finished? I need something that sounds like *this"*, and he'd show up with a song, we'd work on it, and change it a little bit. We'd fit it all together like that.

Dave: Lyrically, it's not a concept record, it's not telling a story…

Matt: Come on! It's about the wizards of long ago…

Dave: Lady Evil…she's a magical mystical woman…..but uh…

Matt:…it touches on being mad at other people, being mad about certain issues, and just hating everything around you….

Q: One thing I really enjoyed about the lyrical slant on the record was the manner in which they deal with romantic relationships…songs like "Don't Call me Tonight", and "Relationshit", two good examples of that…I was curious if you might expand and elaborate on those songs…

Dave: "Relationshit" deals with a relationship I was in that was like, go out for two months/break up for two months, for about a year and a half…. I felt it would be better to stress the anger resulting from that situation than writing songs stressing how miserable I was….

Matt: Yeah, and the first song [Don't Call Me Tonight] is about a relationship with my girlfriend…we were fighting a lot at that point in time, so that song dealt with that. If you're in a relationship, and things aren't working, things aren't the same as they were before, and you don't know what you can do to make it better because everything just makes it worse….everything you do is wrong, everything they do is wrong…it's just a big mess, and it was just like "I don't fucking want to talk to you, I don't want to talk to anybody." That was what inspired me to write the song, but it a lot of it dealt with the fact that at that point I didn't want to talk to *anybody*, not just her. Just talking about it would make me feel bad, so I'd rather be by myself.

Q: Songs such as "No One Gets In", and "Close My Eyes and Hope For The Worst", for instance, seem to reflect some of the issues and general mentality that was prevalent in Dead Nation, but to a more visceral, extreme degree in a lot of ways. When you write songs such as those, and paint a grim, often excruciating picture of a psychological state and way of looking at the world, what are some underriding motivations that contribute to these themes?

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Matt: Just getting treated like shit, you know, are why those songs were written as they were. Getting shit on by your girlfriend, or getting treated badly because of the way you look, getting treated badly by your parents because a band is the main focus in your life…just opening yourself up to people, and getting treated like an asshole and feeling rejected makes you not want to talk to anyone ever, or hope you die.

Dave: Especially in hardcore, you have a lot of friends that are people you'll be hanging out with all the time, but so many people grow out of it or move on. And these kids that were your best friends you now have nothing in common with. It makes you wonder why you bothered. It makes you jaded, whether it be about hardcore, or even friendship. There are so many people that you'll be with every day for a couple months, and then they go to College, or just get out of it. Even those kids will give you shit for still doing what you do the same way your parents do. It's just fucked up when a lot of your friends come on the same level that your parents do.

Q: In light of the massive catalogue of music the band has already amassed, what is it about your writing process that allows for such a massive influx of material to be written in such a short amount of time?

Matt: There's two really big reasons behind the large number of songs and records the band has been able to come up with. One is that we're losers…we have nothing better in our lives to do than our band, so we spend a lot of time writing songs, and working on songs. Instead of hanging out, we'll stay home, and work on stuff.

Dave: (to Matt)You go out way more than I do….I stay home probably four to five nights a week. There's one night that's practice fit into that. If something makes you mad, or upsets you, you want to write something about it. We practice pretty regularly, and play a lot, so a lot of songs come out of it.

Matt: It's just what the kids in the band love to do. We all love to make music. Any time that we can spend on writing it is good. We've been really lucky, because any time we've finished a group of songs that we wanted to use for a 7" or full length, one of our friends would be like, "I really want to do a record with you.", and we'd say "Well, ok, we pretty much just finished one, so we can release it together." A lot of the writing has to do with kids in the band being mad or upset, and trying to do something positive with it, instead of slashing ourselves up, or smoking up all the time. When channeling that anger into music, you have something positive to show for it, you play shows, you hang out with other kids playing in bands, doing something positive instead of destroying yourself.

Dave: You can't get that release from anything else other than playing, screaming your lungs out, and giving it everything you've got, be it once a week at practice, or five nights a week on tour. That release is what you need. The period between Dead Nation and Tear It Up, I didn't know what to do with myself, because I was so pent up, I needed that outlet. I don't know what I'll do after Tear It Up…..

Matt: Go to jail…(laughs)

Q: Your live sets are certainly some of the more chaotic melees I've experienced. In the midst of the pandemonium, what would you hope kids come away with after having seen Tear It Up?

Matt: A positive regard for moshing. It seems like a lot of bands don't like kids moshing at their shows, and a lot of bands have problems with kids moshing to hard at their shows, and I don't think either of those things happens at our shows. We like kids to have a good time, and dance in a positive way where everybody can have a good time. I know that when I first started going to shows, a big thing was kids beating the shit out of each other, and I didn't really like that. Then I saw other bands, where kids were going crazy, but everybody was helping each other out, and having a good time.

Dave: I'd want kids to know we're no bullshit. What I'm saying, how I act, is how I really am….

Matt: OK, that too….(laughs)

Dave: …I feel the same way about every show that I play. I put everything I have into it. My main background is going to spiky punk shows. Those were the shows I started going to. It's not like every kid who is into that is fake, but so many kids into that are just in it for the look, to seem cool. I just want kids to know that that's not what I'm going for. This is really how I am…what I sing about is really how I am.

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Q: In suit with your sizeable number of releases has been a lot of touring. What are some thoughts about getting out on the road? Where have you enjoyed playing?

Dave: I love touring. I love getting away from the life I lead, and just going somewhere else....just for the sake of being there. Most parts of California are great, I really liked playing San Diego.... it sucked for Dead Nation, but it's been really good for Tear It Up...

Matt: I think it was the kind of bands they had on the show. We showed up in this beat up van, looking like shit, and all these guys looked like models, had all the latest equipment, and brand new vans. There were kids pulling up in Benzes in the parking lot.

Dave: I'm not going to name names....if you play in LA, most kids are psyched, but Japanese bands, European bands, US bands all play LA....if you play a place like Bellinghman, Washington, which is like an hour from the Canadian border, no one goes up there. We played a very small show, but kids were genuinely excited to see another band come through there.

Matt: We did a drive from St. Louis to Bellingham, and we stopped at Devil's Tower in South Dakota...it's just this fucking *rock* that goes straight up...it's flat on top...

Dave: Like something out of Close Encounters...

Matt: ....It's in the middle of nowhere. There's lightning crackling all around, and the radio station's all static, it was dark out, and we were like "Fuck this, we're going!". The other band that was on tour with us, one of the kid was freaking out, saying "We've got to go!" It was at least half an hour off the highway, but we went anyway. It was rad.

Dave: That was a great day. The summer tour we did with Fast Times, we had a lot of great days. We had a day off in LA because our show got canceled, and we went swimming in the Pacific Ocean. One of the funnest days of the entire tour....

Matt: Dye my hair blonde, go back to the beach...[Another State Of Mind reference] (laughs) A big difference is the way in which kids respond to bands, too. The first time I went out to the West Coast, seeing kids dance the way they do out there.....

Dave: ...West coast got no style! (laughs)

Matt:...it's just way different, it's kind of like, "Yo, we don't do that shit over here!" (laughs) so, it's interesting seeing how kids go off for your band if they're into it. Touring's great as long as you play every show as hard as your last show....as long as you go to every show and do it for you, not for the crowd...it's cool if the kids like you, but if the kids hate you, who cares? It's just great to be able to play. If people like you, awesome. It's great to hang out, and make new friends, and eat ice cream in cool new places.....

Dave: There's always ice cream.....anyway, it's great to play a place like St.Louis....

Matt: St. Louis was awesome....

Dave: It was great. A lot of bands just skip the whole middle of the country, bands do these tours where they play the West coast or the East Coast...the middle of the country just gets omitted all the time... the show in St. Louis one that we had no expectations for, it was great...

Dave: We played in Ft. Worth, Texas, and met some great kids...I still see them all the time. They travel real far...we played in California, they were there.

Q: Well, to wrap things up, I'd like to bring up a quick reference to the whole 'bandana thrash' style that has re-surfaced as of late in the midst of countless other such subdivisions in hardcore...I know you were quick to refute such categorizations, but I was curious as to your thoughts on the whole fashion clique issue itself....how do you view it and other such tendencies?

Dave: As a quick side note, I'd like to add that in a place like Japan, scenes don't mix at all. There's traditional, Gauze-style hardcore (newer bands like Forward and Judgement), the crust scene, and the more Americanized scene, and you get beat up if you go to the wrong shows. If you're a touring band, you only play with a specific kind of band only [that best suits your sound]. You don't play multiple kinds of shows. It's just real severe. In the US, I think we've played a lot of different types of shows. We play youth crew type shows...we don't play too many crust shows, because we never get booked with them. We'll play anything. We've definitely played some bad shows. In reference to divisions now, it could be worse....when people try to do one of those I'm going to get every kind of band on this show-bills, it seems like they never work out like they want them to, anyway.

Matt: I don't see what the problem is. Go out there and rock, who cares. I listen to a lot of different types of music, let alone different styles of hardcore. These cliques get everyone all bent out of shape for nothing.

Q: Last but not least, what are some bands that you would recommend who aren't getting the credit they deserve?

Matt: Definitely Down In Flames from New Jersey. They're definitely one of the best bands playing, and people brush over them a lot, I feel.

Dave: They've been around longer than us, but they're still opening shows. I think their LP is one of the best LPs that has come out in a long time. I listened to it this morning. They're doing the US tour with us. I think that a lot of people who know who we are will know who they are, but anyone who doesn't, will definitely get to see a great band.

Matt: Also, Blind Society from New Jersey....they're a really great band. They have a 12" and CD coming out on Blackout! It's the whole scene segregation thing, man, they're decently big in the spiky hair punk/Oi! Scene, but their music is hardcore....

Dave: They're punk looking kids, and most hardcore kids don't even want to give them a chance. Also, they've been around a long time, and weren't nearly as good at first, so kids might have seen them a while ago and may not have been impressed, but their new stuff is great. There's a lot going on in Massachusetts...Think I Care is a *great* band...I don't think they get as much recognition because they don't play as much out of state. Dragnet is another Massachusetts band that is really good.

Matt: Holding On from Minneapolis...they're one of the best bands playing. They should be huge, they should honestly be one of the biggest bands in hardcore. They're great friends of ours, and one of the best bands we ever get to play with. Everyone should be into that band.

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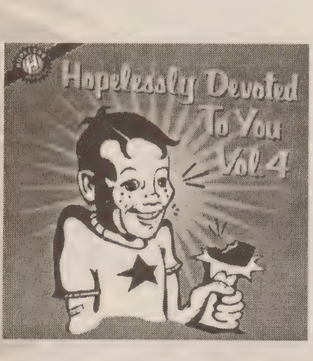
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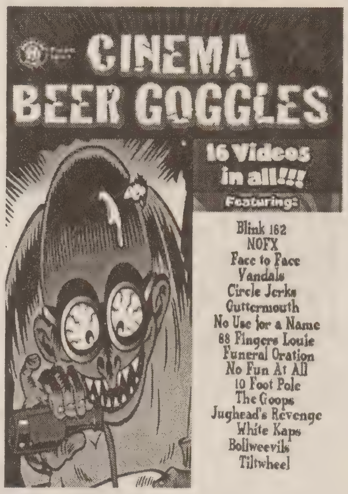
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FIXER welcome to the jungle

by Jim Testa

Evan Saffer – vocals
Wilson – guitar
Jason Brown – bass
Tim Newton – drums

And now for something completely different…

If "alternative rock" supposedly offers an alternative, than what's the point of having a dozen different New York City bands who all look and sound more or less like the Strokes? Frankly, I've had my fill of moody art students in thrift-store suits who slouch on stage and mumble their lyrics through a druggy haze.

Enter Fixer, a young quartet who seem as out of place in the current New York club scene as a pair of brown loafers with a black tuxedo. Instead of kneeling at the altar of the Velvet Underground and swearing fealty to the low-key, lo-fi vibe of Guided By Voices, Fixer sweats like classic Guns 'N Roses, wails like vintage Aerosmith, and doesn't seem the least embarrassed to be excited about the prospect of making music come alive in front of an audience.

It's a little after 8 p.m. on a weeknight in late August, and the four members of Fixer – sweaty and barechested in their humid, airless Williamsburg rehearsal cell – roar through "Bend Over Backwards," an anthemic rocker they're hoping to record soon. But they're not tippy-toeing through the track, focusing on their fingering or trying to polish their chops, the way you might imagine a band rehearses a new song. They are wailing full-tilt - frontman Evan Saffer waving his mike stand even in these cramped quarters and hitting the high notes full-throttle, as guitarist Wilson writhes over his ax and bassist J Brown blares out his harmony backups. "It's arena rock for small clubs," says Brown, smiling. "It's the only way we know how to do it."

Fixer came together about two years ago. "Basically, I was a singer looking for a band, and they were a band looking for a singer," recalls Evan. "Both their band had me had a mutual friend at the William Morris Agency… and they put us together. So we started jamming together and we liked it a lot, and that was about in late 2000. Six months after that, we got rid of our bass player. I had played with Jason in our college band for several bands, so we invited him in and same thing – great vibe right away, and we've been together ever since."

"It's basically a matter of two and two," adds drummer Tim Newton. "Wilson and I had played together since '95, and Evan and Jason knew each other from before."

"Our dream was to find that perfect Led Zeppelin sort of ensemble," says guitarist Wilson, who admits to being heavily influenced by guitar heroes like Jimmy Page and Slash. "The kind of band where everyone's got their chops, everyone's got their defined role." But, he notes, it wasn't just chops. "I wanted to have a band that was the total package – not just the guitar parts, but good songs wrapped around them, as well as the personality. That's what's really missing from rock right now."

"I really liked Wilson and Tim right away," notes Evan, "and I really liked the direction they were going in. They were good musicians and once Jay came into the mold, we really started finding our sound."

Unfortunately, that sound – a return to the brash, brazen, raunchy rock 'n' roll of the late Eighties – turned out to be completely at odds with the low-fi, new-wavey, punk-influenced bands who started grabbing the public's (and the music industry's) ear in the wake of the Strokes' unexpected breakthrough last year.

"Yeah, that really sucks," says Wilson. "We've got the chops, and once they hear us, people do latch on to us. So we know we've got something here. "But all the trendy hipsters don't want anything to do with us."

"We're just pretty left of the target in terms of what everyone's latching on to right now," says Evan. "I think we'll ultimately transcend that, and I think our hard rock sound will find an audience. But for right now, while the spotlight's on New York, it's not on us, and that's kind of frustrating. And it's also hard for us to find good bills that match our band."

"We play a lot of metal shows," says Wilson. "Not that we want to, but that's where we get booked. And that's frustrating too."

While Fixer may not have a lot in common with their trendier competition – the Realistics, Interpol, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, or whoever the NYC buzz band of the moment may be – they do keep an ear open to what's going on. "We all read Rolling Stone and look at the weekly papers, so I think we all have a good idea of what's going on," says Jay. "Some of us may go to more shows than others, but I think we're all aware of what's going on in New York." "I think one way or another, if we're not writing, playing, rehearsing, or performing, we're watching," says Evan. "We're totally immersed in the life of music." "You need to pay attention just to see what's getting people's attention right now," adds drummer Tim. "There's obviously something there. So you're always listening and trying to learn something from the other bands that are getting attention."

And while there's very little about Fixer's sound that could be described as punk, the band obviously understands the punk concept of DIY. The group parted ways with a manager several months ago, preferring to manage and book themselves. Wilson burns the labels for their self-released demo at his day job, and the band maintains an impressive website and email list, all of which has helped spread the word.

"I think what's happening is that we started out with a lot of doors to break down – the club owners, the press, the record labels – they weren't that embracing," says Evan. "But that's all turning around now. We're getting press coming regularly to our shows. We've had some label interest. We're getting invited to play gigs, instead of having to make a hundred phone calls just to play one show. And we're getting invited to some festivals now…"

"We're finally getting some people to say 'It's time for that rock turnaround,' which is what we've been saying for the last four years now," adds Wilson. "There no new bands in New York that I've latched on to as a fan in ages, that I can relate to, who have that Guns 'N' Roses rock guitar, that fiery lead singer…"

"Relax, we'll bring that back," says Jay, laughing.

"But that's what we want to do," adds Wilson, " to bring back the rock star band."

Fixer's rock pyrotechnics come alive in large part through Evan Saffer's soaring vocals, which recall Robert Plant's range and dynamics. "I studied a lot in high school and I was in musical theater through college, and recently I started taking classical voice lessons again," he notes.

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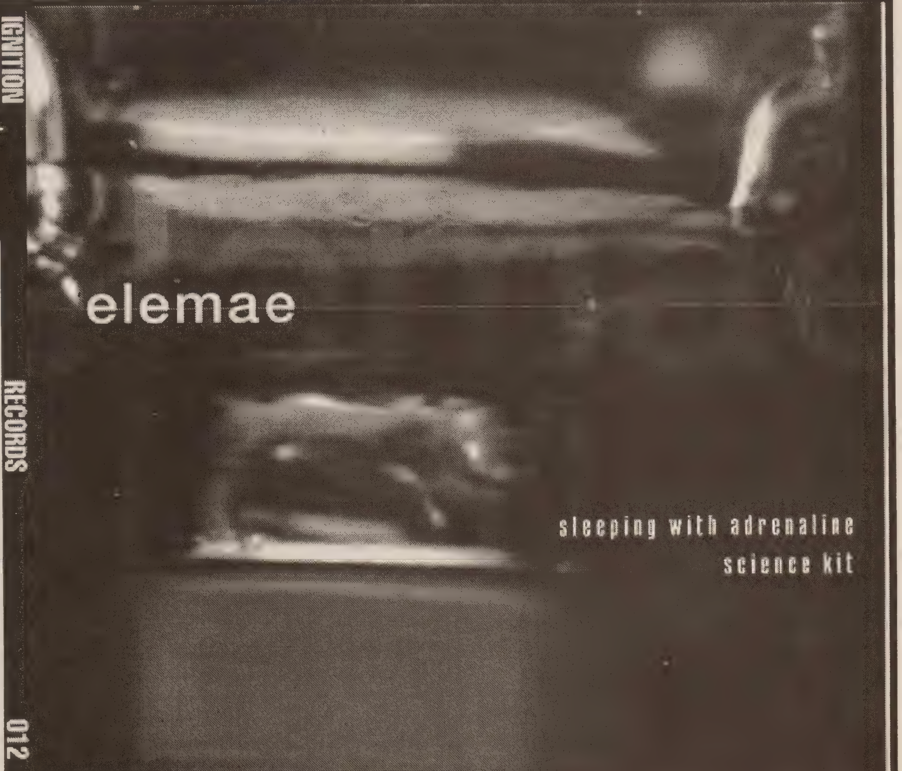

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"Evan and Jay were both directors of their college *a cappella* group as well, which really helps us doing harmonies," adds Wilson. "There's a lot of vocal knowledge in this band. We tried to do harmonies earlier in the band, without really having the chops or the background to pull it off, and it was just ear-splitting. Once we had Evan and Jay in the band, we could finally do it right."

But it's not just the notes that Saffer hits; it's the way he goes about it. Flamboyant, aggressive, charismatic.... Call it whatever, but Saffer doesn't just sing a song, he delivers it... all wrapped up in a bright shiny package that's equal parts sweat, testosterone, swagger, and sex appeal.

"I definitely am not shy," admits Evan, who's usually shirtless by mid-show and plays to the crowd with crazed abandon. "A couple of times I've taken some real big chances on stage that were slightly shocking, so we got that reputation early on. I think as a creator and as an artist, that's something I'm really proud of. It takes balls and it takes... and you have to take chances to make breakthroughs. And I think more than ever, this is a great time for Fixer. We've been through that start-up time that it takes to know each other as people and songwriters and musicians and performers. So our stage show is, like, we're all pretty happy with it. It's going in the right direction."

But what's with the striptease? "I really don't know where that came from, I don't ever remember doing that in other bands I've been in," says Evan. "But our very first show that we played under the name Fixer, I remember taking my shirt off before the first song even started, jumping on a table, and pouring a pitcher of water over my head. I just felt this energy from these guys, and from then on, it was no rules."

"It's funny because people comment on it, some people love it and some don't, but at least we always get a lot of girls at our shows," says Wilson.

"I've even had guys come up to me and say, 'yeah, you're music's okay, but I always go because there are always a lot of hot girls at your shows'," adds Tim, laughing. "Girls really like our band. I don't want to say we're the Bon Jovi of the new millennium, but the guy has sold a lot of records, so what the hell?"

"We haven't quite gotten to the point where every single show, there are more and more people coming, so there are huge lines at the door, but we are doing all right," says Tim. "It just hasn't gotten to the point where it's snowballing where we want it to. It's really hard to do that in New York."

"But the thing about our show is that I don't really feel we're a bar band," adds Evan. "Even when we've only had ten people there, whether they're guys or girls – and usually it's a good mix – people come right up to the front of the stage. They're locked in. And it's really an engaging show. Even when we're on these motley bills that you were talking about, with a lot of bands that don't sound anything else like us, before and after the crowd will be milling and talking. But as soon as we come on, they're right up at the front of the stage."

The band's relentless gigging, an impressive internet presence, and plenty of postering over the past year has paid off as Fixer has steadily inched up the food chain -- from nowhere gigs at dives like the Baggott Inn, Lion's Den, and other small New York clubs to classier venues like the Mercury Lounge, Maxwell's, and Brooklyn's North Six and Southpaw. With New York City rents and a rehearsal space to pay for, the band's members do find themselves tethered to day jobs, but that hasn't kept them from playing outside the five boroughs.

"We try to get up to Boston a lot, we play in Baltimore quite a bit, Connecticut... we do try and get out on weekends and play out of town whenever we can." "We try to get out of here at least every weekend," adds Jay.

"I think we're on the threshold of a big movement," says Evan. "We're about to start hitting the entire East Coast, or at least the North East, aggressively. We're just waiting for the tools. You know, you need a van, you need to get a CD out there, and t-shirts. There's no point of going on the road if you don't have anything to leave behind."

"We're still looking for that producer who can take the energy that impresses people live and get it on tape," says Wilson. "We've yet to find that and it's really what we need."

With a new recording project in the works – Evan got a cell phone call from the sister of the cousin of a major-label producer as we were talking, which is the way these things often happen for unsigned bands – and an increasingly impressive roster of local gigs to their credit, Fixer certainly seems on their way. Even if they do still stick out like a sore thumb.

"Ideally, you want the crowd, and the execution, and at this point, we bust our ass doing promotion and everything we can to get people out to the shows," Evan sums up. "But our biggest thing is that we just want to execute. Whether it's ten people or ten thousand, I just want to feel like we did an awesome show. And that's what it's all about. Getting together, practicing, working, waiting for that break. We have friends in bands who have that philosophy that you take any show you can get, even if it means selling tickets or playing to empty rooms. We've done that, now we're being more selective and it's paying off. We're getting invited to play better shows. People are coming to us. And I think we're going to stick with that... Right now, we're still doing the DIY thing. We're looking for a great producer who's got our vibe and who we vibe with. We'd just like to get a deal and get out there. I think we could appeal to a lot of people. It's just a matter of opening their eyes. It's hard, it's really hard in New York, because of this hipper-than-thou attitude, plus just the problem that there are a million bands here vying for attention. But that's where we are right now, and we're just going to keep plugging away. Rock and roll."

"And then," adds Wilson, "rule the world eventually."

Visit Fixer on the web at www.fixermusic.com

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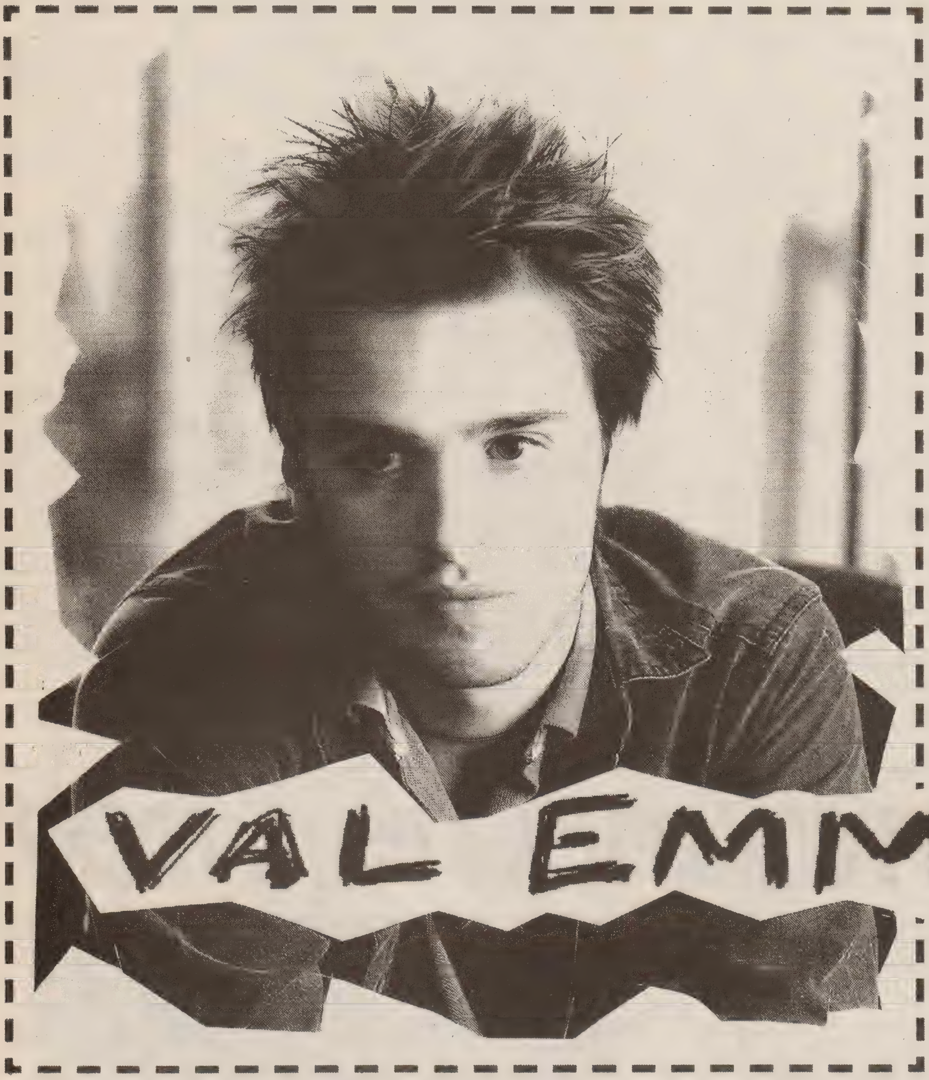

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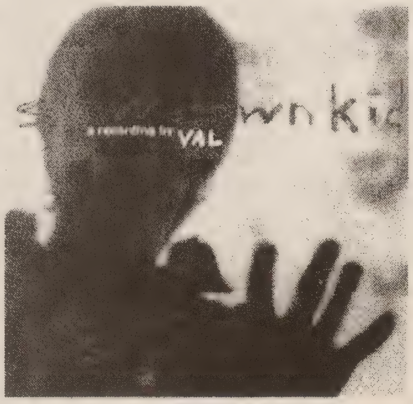

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The Realistics take on Post-Strokes NYC

Interview by Laura Young

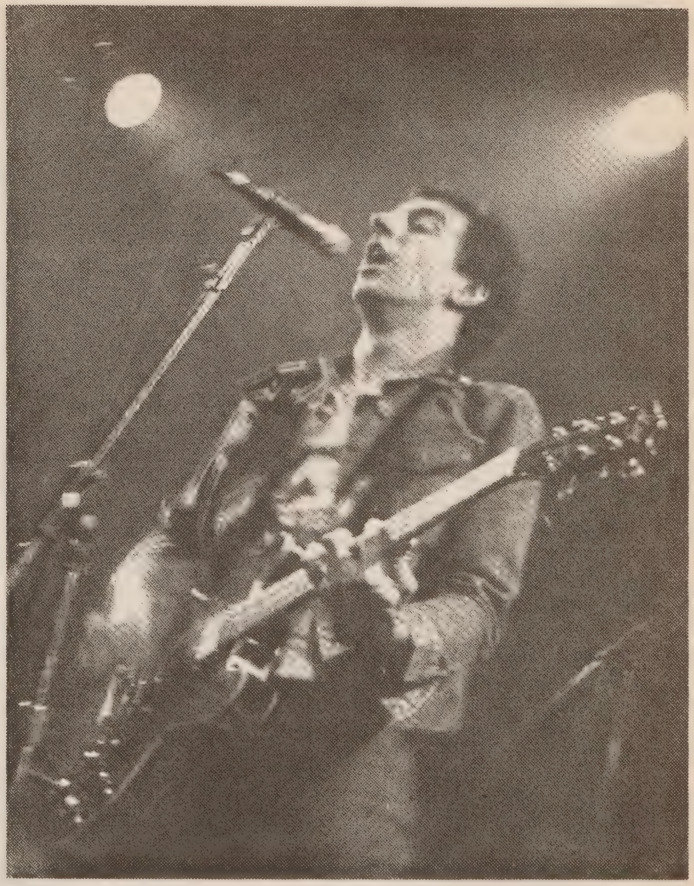

Photo by Laura Young

That split-second right after someone mentions a band - oh it's *so hot*. Your mind races while it sifts through the back catalogue of your music knowledge. If you're lucky, you pull up the appropriate file and a momentary mental picture flashes through your brain, fading away as fast as it came. But it's not the image that is of particular importance. You should be more interested in whatever feelings the flash-pan pic conjures. Why? Because *that's* the truest sense of how you feel about a band- what you feel about them before you have time to really think. Forget *gut reaction* - that's just the pre-show sandwich you scarfed down moving 'round your stomach. It's your *brain reaction* that counts, rock nerd.

I've got one of those pre-programmed mind images for the New York City quartet The Realistics: Lead singer Dennis squat-sits with a lampshade on his head, a canned Heineken in his left hand, and a look of mock innocence masks his face. Oh yeah, and it's all blurry looking - with colors swirling in the background - a bit of that "arty" look, but in a nice, unpretentious way.

But that's exactly the way The Realistics' neo-80's-new-wave pop-rock jangling soul sound makes me feel *up there*. Goofy, half-drunk, ironic, and fucking cool - but not fucking obnoxious. And the same description applies to the band members themselves, although I should change it from *half*-drunk to *fully*-drunk for certain people in the group. Dennis, drummer Dave, keyboardist Will, or bassist Mike - take your pick.

Screw that. From what I've seen, they're *all* drunks. It's Thursday, July 11, 2002 and we're all hanging out in the dressing room at NYC's Bowery Ballroom before their show with Longwave and Dopo Yume. There are two large gray ice-filled plastic tubs sitting on the floor- one is stocked with water, the other with beer. The beer is going quicker.

Dennis has dark curly hair and is rail-thin. So thin you'd imagine he gets most of his clothing from the women's section, judging by the way his denim jacket sleeves fall short of reaching his wrists. Wait a minute - is that jacket from... *the Gap*? Um...Forget it. He's in a corner, tuning his new guitar. Will's to his right, sitting in an elbow-to-knees hunch. I'm informed that the black Sun Records logoed t-shirt he wears today is actually the same shirt he's been stewing in for the last *five days*. And from the looks of his sweaty disheveled brown hair, I believe it to be true.

Mike is sitting to my left, looking Zen-master relaxed in the crook of the corner-couch we're on. He's wearing a black button-down and dark-colored corduroys, but it's July and hot out outside. IT IS JULY. AND IT IS HOT OUTSIDE. WHY IS HE WEARING CORDUROYS? Quite rightly so, I'm confused. Dave is to Mike's right - black t-shirt revealing tattooed forearms - head down, tapping on a snare drum, tapping on the table, tapping, tapping, and tapping with *those damn sticks*.

And I don't think the AC is working properly. But it's all right. I love The Realistics. TKTKTKTKTTKTKTKTKTKTKTK.

I'm doing my best to do the "journalist" thing and instead of getting a hard-hitting, straightforward Q&A, worthy of a Pulitzer in rock reporting, stuff like this is happening:

Q: How would you complete this phrase- "The music we play is..."?

DAVE: Orange.

Q: Orange? What do you mean by orange?

DAVE: It just sounds like the color looks.

(*laughter in the room*)

DENNIS: (*laughs*) Jesus Christ.

Q: (*pleads*) That doesn't mean anything!

DAVE: Sure it does. You gotta think about it.

Boozers. Clearly.

But before the deep-seated fall into rock 'n' roll despair and drunkenness, there were four happy lads living life on the more suburban New York islands of Staten and Long. The Realistics back-story isn't terribly interesting- someone's gotta teach them to lie more- but it involves something about Dennis and Will going to high school in Tottenville (or as the kids called it, "Rottenville") both wearing "el disgusto" glasses. The similar specs were one of the reasons they consequently bonded, seeing as how they got beat up by the same kids for their fashion faux pas. And then Dave befriended Will from the NY club "scene" and met D. that way...or whatever... you get it. But the beaut is Mike's bit:

DENNIS: And Mike, made noises until we hung out with him.

WILL: We found him on a street corner.

Q: What?

DENNIS: Actually, the way that we met- he was playing sitar underneath a bridge.

WILL: That's true.

Q: [to Mike] You were not!

WILL: He really was. No joke.

MIKE: (*shakes head in agreement*)

DENNIS: I'm dead serious, I'm *really* dead fucking serious. He was playing a sitar underneath a bridge on Staten Island. We were going there to hang out- and we see *this fucking guy* playing a sitar. From a distance it looked like he was naked because he had the *fucking thing* in front of his underwear and uh, that's how we met Mike... And after that we were afraid not to be friends with him.

Q: Truly a bonding experience.

DENNIS: Yeah and then we all put clothes on Mike and decided to be in a band together.

MIKE: That was pretty cool.

So around three and a half years ago:

DENNIS: It was Will who got us all together, 'cause we all knew each other- we knew that we were all good musicians and Will was actually the one who said, "Ok everybody, come down to this practice space at this time- just try to do this."

WILL: I think we were all just getting fed up in the groups we were in and not having enough creative input ...just kind like being a side show- a side act, so-

MIKE: Will and I were in another band together right before we started The Realistics-

WILL: Yeah, we wrote a couple songs for that band... they weren't too happy with them. That night I told them, "Alright, tonight I'm calling Dave, I'm calling Dennis and we're gonna do this."

TRANSITION TKTKTKTKTKTKTKTK

They all regularly commute to their "dirty, smelly, crappy, dank" practice space on Staten Island- where rent's cheaper than Manhattan or Brooklyn and they don't have to share a room with any other bands. It seems things are good out there on the landfill island- The Realistics get along with their landlord, whose most threatening course of action on late rent is "putting you in a headlock and giving you a noogie," Will enthusiastically explains.

They used to rehearse a lot more- like during the inception of the band, when no one had jobs and there was a lot of time to be wasted locked up in the rehearsal space working on tunes, sandwiched between the horrific sounds of neighboring death metal bands. In fact, most of the 75 completed songs they have were made in the first two years the band existed. But now they're lucky to get out there three or four times a week since everyone's so busy doing... *stuff.* Jobs and gigs and ... *stuff.*

Q: So what's your songwriting process like?

WILL: I write the good ones and we just kinda take it from there.

DENNIS: We all write, all four of us. For instance, Mike will come in with a chorus, I'll come in with a verse, Will comes in with a bridge, Dave will come in with a solo or another bridge... One of us will have an idea and it'll either be a whole idea or half of an idea or a quarter of an idea and we all sit in and we all just put in everything everyone has so it doesn't sound like *this* person's song, it just *everyone's* song.

DAVE: Sometimes we have no idea.

DENNIS: Sometimes we just sit there for hours just staring at our equipment.
(*laughter*)

DAVE: "Work! Play something! C'mon!"

Q: You don't even touch it- you just let it sit there...

DAVE: Just look at it-

WILL: "What do you wanna play? I dunno what do you wanna play?"

DENNIS: "Dude- did you hear *that? That was awesome!*"

TRANSITION TKTKTKTKTKTKTK

Photo: Natalie Gruppuso

When I ask about the new 7-song limited edition EP that they recorded earlier this year in Boston and the full-length album they're currently working on, everyone seems jazzed:

DAVE: It's really good.

DENNIS: Yeah, it's really good. The first record, we were babies. You know, we had a lot of money- we had a big fucking studio-

WILL: We didn't have a lot of money-

DAVE: We didn't have a lot of money-

DENNIS: (*pauses*) We had a good, decent sized budget and went in and recorded it... We just went a little too nuts... It's a great fucking record, don't get me wrong, I like it- but we were just young when we did it. We didn't have the sound we have now. For this one, we just stripped it all down and did everything the way it should sound live- it's us in a room and a couple of things were added here and there but not so much it takes away from the music and it just came out really good. We're only done with half of it right now, so it's not finished but there's definitely more consistency to it than the last one and....

WILL: (*interrupts*) It's a lot more orange.

Q: But the EP?

DENNIS: We were just hungry to get something new out because we felt that the record was robbing us of a good thing- not to say that the record is bad... but we've just moved past that thing.

DAVE: We've been playing shows trying to support it, trying to sell it for the last two years.

DENNIS: People love the record, but when they go to a show and all they hear is new stuff they're like, "Well, wait- where's 'Angie'?" We still play a couple songs from that record- in the set we play two or three songs off of it. The last show we did in New York, at the Coda Lounge, we did our very first encore- we played two songs from that record, which was really cool.

Q: I know we kinda touched upon it, but can we talk more about the band's evolution?

DAVE: Well I actually think we've more *devolved* than *evolved*.

Q: I *knew* you were going to say that! (*laughter*) I really did! I was thinking, "I betcha he's gonna say something like that to throw me off."

DENNIS: We went from frogs to tadpoles.

Q: What does that mean, *really*?

DENNIS: We really did take a step down - well not a step down, like in songwriting or the quality of songs. It's just that everyone has finally found a place within the band- (*snickering*) No, you know what I mean-

DAVE: I play the drums, Will plays the-

Q: Glad you got that figured out by the second album.

DAVE: Well, I was just thinking about this recently. After a while, like in any kind of relationship, you're bound to start reading someone's mind. Like Mike and I really pay attention to one another when we're playing- I kinda know what I think he's gonna go for sometimes before he goes for it and vice versa. When you get to know the way somebody plays, somebody's personality, the way it comes across through their instrument, it's almost impossible not to gel together, so that's what we've devolved into- instead of four people we've sort of meshed into one- maybe one and a half.

There's a brief moment of silence in which everyone's thoughts settle.

TKTKTKTKTKTKTKTKTKTK

Q: What inspires you?

WILL: Ray Charles.

DENNIS: Beer. Beer inspires you.

DAVE: Nicotine, caffeine are always favorites.

DENNIS: I can't speak for everyone, but for me, traveling so much- that's inspiring. You're living out of a suitcase, going to all these different places and meeting all these different people. It can't *not* inspire you... Inspiration just seems to be there all the time and I don't know... just waking up inspires us.

MIKE: Somebody can play something- just a little part- just one little 2 bar, measure part and I'll just hear a whole song around it. I'll drive everybody nuts, trying to keep them in the studio as late as I can and try to get that inspiration down because it'll never come back. I could hear somebody play a couple of chords and if I hear some sorta catchy element of that, I'll ponder it for the rest of the day and try to do whatever I can around it... Also, whenever I hear new music I go on this creative binge for like week- new bands get me really excited.

Q: Well, what have you been listening to lately?

MIKE: Some Billy Childish records - what else - that Brendan Benson record - I like that a lot...Been on a total Bowie-binge.

DENNIS: There you go. Bowie. He looks amazingly ridiculously good.

DAVE: He gets his blood drained, you were telling me.

DENNIS: No, that's Keith Richards.

(*laughter*)

DENNIS: And Keith Richards looks like shit!

DAVE: I've got this amazing Gregory Isaacs's record called "Cool Ruler" which is just this – the best makeout record ever and I've been listening to a lot of old Who- a really big Who kick.

DENNIS: Actually we've all been on that.

DAVE: We've been listening to the first album in the van a lot recently. Um... this is really embarrassing actually. Our last show in Boston, after we played they threw on this Iron Maiden record I hadn't heard in a really long time and I just got so fucking psyched- I knew ever drum fill and I was like, "Oh my god!" Someone opened up my eyes to heavy metal again. I was totally 14 years old again.

DENNIS: (*to Will*) What about you, young squire?

WILL: I really haven't been listening to that much. I haven't had the time really, but I picked up the new Elvis Costello album, so I've been listening to that a lot. It's cool it's got a couple of rockin' tunes on it. And I always listen to old soul music I love a lot, like Otis Redding.

TRANSITION TKTKTKTKTKTKTTKTK

Q: Are you guys excited about London?

DENNIS: *London-town!* See, that's gonna be a big inspiration...

Q: How did that come about?

DENNIS: London was our manager, Chris Davies. He really wanted to get us over there- while it's- obviously... (*lowers voice*) they're into New York right now and...

Q: Really? The British? *Into New York?* Wait a minute...

DENNIS: It's just not New York, I mean I think that our sound... (*trails off*) Honestly, that's the one thing we kinda want to avoid. Like we don't want to- I mean it's gonna be impossible- but anyway, I think the sound we have is going to translate well to the London crowd.

WILL: (*mock sarcasm*) It's *soooo hot* right now...

DENNIS: *It's soooo hot.* We're not trying to cash in on the New York thing; we're just trying to get over to a new place that will be accepting of our sound.

WILL: From the USA as far as we are concerned.

DENNIS: Yeah.

WILL: The Yankees. Yank Rock.

When Mike tells me that The Realistics will most likely be doing some dates in China this year, I think he's kidding me. But he's the Quiet One, so maybe not.

and then there's... www.therealistics.com

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baby dayliner

high heart & low estate

By Tris McCall

baby dayliner is a performer. the brooklyn club is packed with hipsters, the curiosity-seekers, the creative and the created, musicians and artists, punk rockers, prog rockers, pop fetishists. they've watched the previous few acts with their arms crossed in the familiar "cool guy" stance, but now their bodies are in motion, hips swiveling, asses shaking. it's almost involuntary, but they're swept away – motorcycle guys who've never danced in their lives, supercilious punk girls with active disdain for disco, all gyrating in motion, hands in the air. they're trying to catch the eye of the young man onstage, teasing him, singing back to him, exhorting him to push harder, give more, and supremely in tune with the audience – his audience, now – he *does!*, head back, singing with passion, fury, and ruthless intelligence, cross-stepping, smiling wide, squeezing every drop of meaning out of each syllable. all arms in the air, now, shouts and whistles, the crowd dancing in a frenzy of recognition and pure excitement, and baby dayliner is whipping them up more; he turns, he shakes, he croons and raps over thunderous beats and bass, one man, one machine, in supreme syncronicity. and now everyone has lost their cool stance entirely, hands out, knees shaking, in thrall to the delirium of the moment. is this the encore set? nah, friend, the show's just started, and it's the closest thing the williamsburg scene will ever have to their own homegrown beatlemania. baby dayliner has arrived.

baby dayliner is a writer. the songs are supremely literate – baby dayliner draws from a formidable lexicon and an enormous repository of interesting and effective storytelling strategies. yet intelligence is never on display for its own sake; instead, it's a tool for communicating sophisticated narratives. some of the songs are missives, many are descriptive, almost all contain indelible, inspiring, and unforgettable language. "high heart and low estate" finds its narrator under a seedy bridge with his girl where their makeout session is framed by the city's nefarious activity; as always, baby dayliner makes the most of the tension and the incongruity. "beatdowns" is an open letter to an ex-girlfriend that employs a baseball metaphor intentionally extended to absurd lengths – it's hilarious, but behind the obvious humor is a tragic meditation on the limits of vicariousness. amusing, ironic, "hoodlums in the hit parade" serves as a knowing anthem for brooklyn artists, juxtaposing hip-hop hyperbole with standard williamsburg discourse to surprising and enervating effect: "we're not obviously eloquent/nor have positions in the government/and that's a shame/'coz we got game", sung to the delight and identification of the local crowd.

baby dayliner is a musical mechanic, a pop song manufacturer, a fabricator of meaning from discarded parts and pieces. drawing from sources as disparate as top-forty radio, underground hip-hop, european post-punk explorations, seventies disco, and mid-eighties synthpop, baby dayliner crafts songs that are undeniable in their immediacy and continually surprising in their melodicism and compositional cleverness. "raid!" begins with a simple new order-style synthesizer pulse, and then builds effortlessly through a propulsive bridge before exploding into a rafter-rattling chorus. the altogether brilliant "silent places" fuses a huge, new romantic chorus to a verse that seems almost classically-inspired – all over a backbeat both slamming and sublime. the thunderous "sha" could be slotted today into heavy rotation on hot-97 – with the swagger and catharsis of jay-z's best tracks, baby dayliner emcees over beats reminiscent of d.j. premiere at his most incendiary. here, as elsewhere, you will be amazed by the effectiveness and inventiveness of the beat programming – baby dayliner understands his machines, and his ability to coax the maximum excitement out of them is unparalled

baby dayliner is a revelation. he takes stages in clubs best known as maximum rock 'n' roll hangouts. he plays punk crowds, hardcore crowds, hip-hop crowd. he regularly follows bands with formidable wattage. he plugs in his dr. rhythm section, walks to stage center, and proceeds to move the crowd. he opens eyes and blows minds. he broadcasts tropes and language from hip-hop and disco in settings where neither hip-hop nor disco are heard, and he sells it *every time*, without ever stooping to condescend to either form. he is making connections between cultural forms, bravely building bridges over formidable chasms, doing profound theoretical work, and all while getting busy and never forgetting to be entertaining. he is fundamentally a communicator, one who makes sure you hear every syllable he sings – and his ever-growing audience hangs on every syllable. by no means is baby dayliner the only one-man act playing stages in new york city – but he is by far the most intelligent, the most multifaceted, the most syncretic and single-minded. and by relentlessly challenging his audience, taking a lead and daring the crowd to follow, he makes a profound impact on every room he plays. but now i've said too much. this act is brilliant, and it encapsulates all the best that the williamsburg scene has to offer. come and see for yourself.

Contact Ethan Marunas at www.babydayliner.com

superdrag

greetings from tennessee

By Darren "Hollywood" Paltrowitz

They've survived tours with Green Day, Weezer and Ben Folds. They've survived MTV Buzz Clip status. They've survived personnel changes. Whether or not you know it, Superdrag are survivors. with frontman John Davis and drummer Don Coffey Jr. at the band's core since day one. 2002 brings Superdrag's fourth full-length, *Last Call For Vitriol*, their second for The Arena Rock Recording Company, yet truly their most diverse release to date. Guided By Voices mastermind Bob Pollard guests on the opening track, "Baby Goes To Eleven," proving that Superdrag are indeed a musician's band.

Q: Has your life ever been made more complicated from sharing your name with the frontmen of both Korn and Folk Implosion?

John: No, I can't say that it has. I don't think I'm in any real danger of being confused with either of those guys.

Q: Your EP for Darla and two records for Elektra seemed to rely heavily on influences from My Bloody Valentine and a lot of noise-heavy pop bands. Did you ever imagine that you'd be recording a straight-up country song like "Safe & Warm" with a pedal-steel?

John: Well, I think that one advantage of having done a record like *Head Trip In Every Key*, or even the new album, for that matter, is that it broadens people's expectations about what they might hear on a Superdrag record. I don't know if that was a conscious choice we made at the time, but we definitely wanted to break out of that pattern of what we'd been doing up until the time we did the second record. Granted, I never would've expected us to do a '60s Bakersfield-style country ballad with pedal steel back in 1994, but then again I never would've expected us to do a song with a sitar and a 28-piece orchestra either! I do know that we always try and bring something new to each record we make, and that you have to go with what feels right and if you feel inspired to do something that comes from out of left field a little bit, it can really make a record a little bit more special and a little bit more fun to listen to.

Q: The two main influences on *In The Valley Of Dying Stars* and the new record seem to be Teenage Fanclub and Guided By Voices -- to my ears at least. What exactly prompted such a departure in sound?

John: I think Teenage Fanclub have been a big influence on the band from day one and I could pretty much say the same about Guided By Voices. In fact, the outro on "Sucked Out" was supposed to sound like "Echoes Myron!" At least the 4-track demo had that kind of feel to it, but of course things change a little bit when you get into the "big studio." I feel like those are just two elements of what we do that may have been brought to the fore a little bit more-so here lately. I still hear a lot of the things that we've always rocked out to in the van on the new record: Dinosaur Jr, Husker Du, My Bloody Valentine, The Pixies, The Replacements, The Beatles, The Kinks, The Who, The Beach Boys, Big Star... I even hear some AC/DC and some Skynyrd in there. I think it's inevitable that anything you listen to a lot will work its way into the music you're making. We're certainly not out to reinvent the wheel, but I'd like to think that after nine years, we've managed to stumble onto a sound that we can call ourown.

Q: A lot of your lyrics on "Vitriol" are about hope, whether or not it seems likely to happen. Since you wrote such fine prose, you've gone sober, gotten married and found faith; in any way do you look back at a song like "Feelin' Like I Do" or "Extra Sensory" and feel regret?

John: No, it's not really a matter of feeling regret, per se. I don't think I had figured out what those songs were really about until the record was finished. By then I'd made a lot of big changes in my life, and I realized that those songs were all about longing for a better, happier way to live, and for a real relationship with God. The songs just capture a moment in time, and even though things are different now, I definitely don't regret having written them. If anything, I regret having been falling-down drunk so much of the time and denying things that I knew in my heart to be true.

Q: With the changes you've undergone, are songs like "Annetichrist" or "I'm Expanding My Mind" going to be kept in the set list? Or do you altogether have no problem with singing what you'd once thought?

John: There again, the songs are the songs, and if there are people in the audience who want to hear them, we'll continue to do them.

Q: Sam [Powers - bass/vocals] really stepped it up on this record writing or co-writing close to half of it. He's obviously a great songwriter, why didn't he write anything for *In The Valley Of Dying Stars?*

John: I guess that record was more or less written by the time Sam joined. In fact, seven or eight of the songs were already in the can. By then, it was just a matter of getting back into the studio and cutting four or five more songs. But to me, the songs that he added his vocals to really stand out. I remember thinking at the time that it would've been nice to have more of Sam's vocals on the album. That's one of the things that I really like about the new record; there are a lot more harmony vocals and things like that. Having another voice in there adds a lot of depth to the songs. And I think our voices blend together nicely. I really couldn't be happier about having Sam on board. He's a great writer, he's a great singer, and he's a great player. He's also our tour manager.

Q: Mike [Harrison - guitar/vocals], who joined back in the fall, has his fair share of fans from his days in The V-Roys and The Faults and Don even has a few co-writes on the new one -- has songwriting become a more democratic process for Superdrag? Or do songs still start off as individual demos that the band pieces together?

John: I'd say it's become a more flexible process. Songs can come together in a variety of ways. For years I'd write something, make a 4-track demo, and present it to the band. With the exception of a few minor arrangement things, it would be finished when it came through the door. Sometimes it still works that way. Other times Sam and I will sit down with nothing and in 30 minutes time, we'll have a finished song. Sometimes Sam will bring in something that's 90% there already, and the four of us will hammer it out. Sam and Mike have worked together on a couple of new things. Don got involved with some of the lyrics on this record, on "The Staggering Genius" in particular. He's a really good arranger, too -- over the years I think that's always been his strong suit in the songwriting process. The song "Baby's Waiting" comes to mind -- I remember having the verse, the chorus and the turnaround, but having no idea how to put them together, how many times to repeat different parts, things like that. on arranged the song from scratch and that's how it came out on record. I look forward to having Mike contribute some songs to the next record. I think things have to progress and evolve as time goes by.

Q: This record is the first one that you guys recorded by yourselves since your long-time producer was out-of-action. Is this something that you think you'll do again for album #5?

John: It's hard to say. We've wanted to make a record at Ardent in Memphis for years, and I think that's something we hope to do the next time around. I don't think we necessarily need to be "produced" anymore, but it would be nice to have an outside engineer in there so that Don wouldn't have to be concerned with anything other than playing drums. He really pulled double-duty on this record, because he did the majority of the engineering, too.

Q: Looking at where you are now, is there anything you would've done differently to get here? Would you have bothered signing to Elektra or any other major label?

John: I don't really have any regrets about anything that we've done. We had the opportunity to sign with Elektra, we went for it, and a lot of good came out of it. In the long run, I think the good has certainly outweighed the bad as far as that whole period is concerned. The negative aspects of dealing with a major label that we experienced were no different than what countless other bands have had to go through. The trick is to come out the other side with your resolve and your love for making music still intact. Sadly, a lot of bands aren't able to do that. No amount of bullshit was going to keep us from doing what we enjoy doing...

Q: Do you have any sort of message for the people that only remember Superdrag for *Sucked Out* and *Destination: Ursa Major?*

John: "Last Call For Vitriol." On sale July 9.

Q: All of that serious stuff aside, you guys are unarguably better live than on record. MP3's of you guys are easy to find online at soundboard quality -- is there going to be a live recording anywhere down the line? And what kind of touring is looking ahead for the rest of 2002?

John: We've been talking about doing a live record for years, but we've never actually gotten around to getting the logistics together to make it happen. Not yet. It's definitely a possibility, though. As far as touring goes, we plan on touring hard until the end of November, taking a break for the holidays, and then picking back up after the New Year. We're starting off in July with a run up the East Coast with Guided By Voices, and after that we'll be headed out West in late July and August.

Q: Who would you want to tour with now that you wouldn't have wanted to when you were 16? And vice versa...

John: I'd love to do a tour with J Mascis + The Fog. When I was 16, it would've been Dinosaur Jr. The Guided By Voices thing is something we've wanted to do for years. I'd love to tour with Teenage Fanclub. I guess most of the bands I'd really like to tour with are the same ones I would've wanted to tour with when I was 16, actually. If that Replacements reunion actually happens, we'd love to open up for them, naturally.

Q: Are there any goals being held to *Vitriol* and the touring that goes in support of it?

John: I guess we'd just like to sell more records than we did last time, and play more shows than we did in support of the last record, to more people. Pretty much the same goals that we always have.

Q: Should anything more be expected from Superdrag and its members in the near-future beyond *Last Call For Vitriol* and that touring?

John: Well, I guess that should keep us pretty well occupied for at least the next year or so, but you never can tell.

Q: Finally, any last words for the kids?

John: *Last Call For Vitriol.* And thanks for listening.

Dead Meadow apply for a position in the new issue of Jersey Beat.

by Greg Matherly

One would be hard pressed to find a meadow in Washington, D.C., and you can rule out the chance of gazing at a craggy mountainside illuminated by the intermittent pulse of spider-web lightning. It just won't happen. Geographically, D.C. is the prime example of urban-planning bureaucracy: oppressive, redundant and sterile. From time to time, however, this political grid plays host to a cultural underbelly that defies its rigidity. Who would have guessed that in the early Eighties, a band of hardcore Rastafarians would bubble up from the National Mall? You don't expect to go from the steps of Congress to a gallery full of R. James Chaconas and Cameron Wolf images, but it's possible. D.C. is a contradiction, and Dead Meadow belong in D.C. like MacBeth belongs in Kinko's.

It's interesting to note that this is the first time in the history of popular music that we've felt the need to make a clear distinction between all the various derivations of rock-n-roll, and the "stoner" strain. I'm sure there are some strong arguments against this terminology from those who grew up on Blue Cheer, Canned Heat, Zeppelin, and Grand Funk, like: Can't it *all* be stoner rock? But alas, the world turns and things compartmentalize. This relatively new genre of heavy rock does come in many shapes and sizes and I've yet to find any solid basis for creating one extremely broad, single niche for all of them.

With such technological luxuries as the ability to reconstruct lo-fi, vintage sound (and synthesize *new* relics), our artistic representations can now become more real than their original objects ever were. As time presses on, we become more and more capable of constructing an accurate past—that never was. Dead Meadow sound as though they missed the fantasy rock boat of the late 60's—not to be confused with the one that sailed through the mid-seventies). They delve into the chimerical hinterland of our collective rock epic, to paint a very particular picture. Let's call it the *pastorale fantastique.*

A Dead Meadow show is a relentless, rhythm-section fuzz ride with guitar *wah* crescendos that all but drown the sparse, spirant vocals. It is a well-educated crash course in the eerie, instrumental landscapes once visited by the likes of Tony and Geezer, Brock and Kilmister. On a Friday, summer night at Brownies in NYC, Dead Meadow tested their volume before embarking on a North American tour to support their new album, *Howls From The Hills* on Tolotta Records. I figured since they were in NY, I'd give them a chance to do what all of my friends have been doing since last September—going to job interviews.

Dead Meadow Are:
Jason Simon – Guitar, vocals
Steve Kille – Bass
Steve McCarty – Drums

Give me your biggest strength as well as your biggest weakness:

Steve Kille: Biggest strength is that I am so strong and motivated and, at the same time, I'm over-motivated and that's my real weakness.

Jason Simon: My strongest point is that I like to get far out, to think about some far-out things, use my imagination. I think my weakness is that my brain isn't with me at the time. I'm somewhere else, so I'll run into shit or I'll lose things. It's like the same thing. Maybe I don't want to be where I am. That's helping you out sometimes. You can think about some cool shit but you forget about what you're doing.

Steve McCarty: I guess my strength is endurance and my weakness is poor bladder control.

SK: Creating shit is my strength. My weakness is poor organization.

JS: We try not to take any shit. That's our strong point, but some people think that's a weakness.

What do you think you have to contribute to Jersey Beat?

SM: We've got a go-go attitude! Fight, win, etc.

SK: It's the attitude of a high school cheerleader at her first game.

JS: I think I'd bring some sort of, maybe I could come around and help things out a little bit. Maybe people are getting too stressed out, worrying about deadlines and stuff like that. They just need to let go of those worries, you know, and calm down, and it should work out. So what an issue may be late. As long as you're having a good time and you're feeling right about what you do.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

SM: Hopefully alive. Um. . . I don't know. Hopefully not at Brownies. I see myself in a much more posh backstage.

SK: I see myself at the Palladium.

JS: I see myself maybe far-off, living in the woods in this little cabin. With a gun to protect my perimeter, to keep off visitors. A couple of goats as my companions. A wife and some little nubbins running around naked. That's not saying that I wouldn't be willing to work.

SK: If Jason is living in the woods, you know he's going to be a psychotic maniac running around with a machete.

Describe your sound in three words.

SM: Mutton chop stew

JS: Fantastical, mindful and heavy.

SK: If it ain't heavy it's shit. That's four words.

Do you have any other skills that might not be apparent to your average listener?

JS: Not really.

SM: Foot massage. I can cook all right. I can massage feet while cooking.

SK: Me and Steve can paint pictures. We're artists, both of sound and of picture.

What was the last record you bought and why?

JS: A CD, a "best of," a kind of introduction of Burt Bacharach. Only eight bucks, you know, a good bang for the buck. A lot of good songs on it; a lot of good acoustic numbers.

SM; Rogers and Hammerstein's soundtrack to *Cinderella.* Because I've been really getting into that song, "Do I love you because you're beautiful or are you beautiful because I love you?"

SK: Sly Stone *Fresh* was the last thing I bought.

You're very close to getting the job, gentlemen. Do you have any references? If so, may we contact them?

SM: Every English teacher I've ever had.

JS: I think you're gonna have to take my word on a lot of this stuff. I really don't know if you should contact anybody. I've slipped out of touch with most of my past.

Gosia Rymscapawlowska (merch person and McCarty's significant other): I can vouch for these boys. They're very nice, clean, outstanding young men. They always pick up after themselves. They have the virtuosity of Boy Scouts. They're 100%. Give them the job.

For further references, consult www.deadmeadow.com

A beer and a chat with Chicago's Lawrence Arms

By Nathan Perry

The Lawrence Arms loves Chicago. And they hate it, too. They've released an excellent record called *Apathy and Exhaustion* on Fat Wreck Chords, their first for the label. They're certainly a band that you're going to want to know more about.

Jersey Beat's Chicago correspondent Nate Perry conducted this interview in the band's natural habitat, at the L+L Tavern in the heart of Wrigleyville. (Word is that this particular bar comes highly recommended, judging by said correspondent's hangover the next day.) Check out this interview with ringleader Brendan Kelly (vocals, bass), a super nice guy who talks about the Lawrence Arms' past, their new record, politics, and of course, Chicago.

Q: I like it here. I didn't expect to find this kind of place in a nicer neighborhood like this...

B: It's a good mix. There's kids who come in here, but it's also a lot of regulars. When I first came here it was all ...older...men... which I kind of liked at the time, but now I appreciate the mix. I like having my friends come down here and feel OK about it.

Q: When did you start hanging around this area?

B: I was raised two blocks from this bar. I moved here when I was nine from St. Louis, so I've pretty much always been in the city. I spent a year in Barrington when my mom got re-married, and I lived in Evanston my freshman year in college when I first went to Northwestern, but my whole childhood was spent right around here.

Q: You've logged a lot of time in bands around here. Why don't you give us a little history on your past bands?

B: Before Lawrence Arms I was in the Broadways. Before that I was in a band called Slapstick. Before that I was in a band called Gladhand, with Chris (vocals, guitar,) who is in the Lawrence Arms now. Chris was also in the Broadways and also Tricky Dick, and Neil was in a band called Baxter, and me and Chris were in JPB with our friend Nick who was in the Gasflies, but, uh, nobody knows about them!

Q: Was the music of the bands similar to what you're doing now?

B: Oh no, well, Gladhand was... I don't even know, we were just a terrible, terrible band. Our guitar player was into Stevie Ray Vaughn, Chris and I were into punk, the bass player liked Chili Peppers-kinda funk, and our drummer was into Pearl Jam, so everyone just played what they played. If you can imagine a punk rock song with a funk bass line, SRV on lead guitar, and terrible drumming with Eddie Vedder-esque background vocals. Worst band you ever heard in your life. But anyway...

Q: In Lawrence Arms, where are you coming from now, what influences and inspires you? That's not a jerkoff question, is it?

B: No, it's a more interesting question than it seems in our case, because Chris and I have been songwriters for so long, it's like the people who first influenced us and got us started writing songs, I don't even think that shit is cool anymore.

But I always write songs based on the last song I wrote, so it's kind of an evolution that comes from my own stuff. I'm influenced by the songs I've written and trying not to write them again. I'm influenced by the books that I've read...getting drunk...

For example, this last weekend, every single night, I don't remember anything after 10 p.m... I stayed out till 5 in the morning every one of those nights, but I only know that based on what my friends have told me. That definitely inspired me to write the song "This Weekend," which is kind of about the nature of memory and the nature of what you're doing. If you don't remember doing it, did it really happen?

And there's a certain degree of self loathing in there. I know on this last record (*Apathy and Exhaustion,* on Fat) my major influence on my lyrics, as far as flow and rhythm and sound of the vowels, was Eminem. Just the way he does all the internal rhyming. That was really at the forefront of my mind, and it still is, that's still where I'm writing from right now. Obviously I'm not going to write lyrics even remotely similar to Eminem's, in terms of content. But in terms of style and flow, that's where I'm at right now.

Q: Well, in terms of lyrical content, there is somewhat of a parallel to Eminem, in the way that a layer of self-hatred seems to appear in your songs. Even the title of the album, *Apathy and Exhaustion,* gives some clues as to the themes on the record. How much of that is real to you? Are you really that depressed?

B: Well, none of that stuff is fake and none of it is overblown at all, but I don't think of myself as a depressed person. I think it may be a common misconception. When you think about movies, where we all know the most people...

Personally, I know way more characters from movies than I do actual human beings, as is probably true with all of us. In the movies we see people as either depressed or happy in terms of what their character does for the story. In life, I'm happy, but I'm very depressed also, and I don't think those two things have to be at odds with each other. On one hand, I have a girlfriend who I love very much, and we have a great time when we're together. When I'm apart from her I miss her because she makes me happy, and the band makes me happy too. But you know, doing the band thing, staying out all night, losing control of myself, that makes me depressed. I get in a fight with my girlfriend, it makes me super depressed, but I just played a good show so that makes me happy. It fluctuates: I think I'm as well adjusted as anyone, and I'm not going to go out and kill myself, but... I deal with the fact that I'm not happy all the time, and that's what's in the songs, I guess. I'm 25 now, and I get two different reactions to this record. The first is "I don't like too much modern music that's come out lately, but I love this," or "man, this record fucking sucks." And you can tell... people over the age of 22 really seem to like it, but people under a certain age, they sometimes like it, but most don't really get it.

Q: Well, being on the Fat Wreck Chords circuit, playing a lot of all-ages shows and playing with a lot of those bands with young appeal, does that create any problems with people digging your music?

B: It's not like we've been on a tour with NoFX or Lagwagon or anything yet, but we went on tour with a band called Starting Line and a band called Yellow Card, which were both super-poppy, Drive-Thru (Records)-type bands. Starting Line's on Drive Thru and Yellow Card is on Capitol, and they have a violin player. In other words, definitely not our scene, playing for a very young crowd. And no, we weren't received particularly well. But those bands are really young, really handsome kids. We get up there and look like old fat slobs, drunk off our ass. It might be a little frightening to the kids, I don't know! (Laughs) But we went out with Taking Back Sunday, on Victory, more young handsome kids. I don't know what they're calling it these days; "emo," I guess. The kind of shit that's not really fast and not really slow but really aggressive and two guys sing different shit at the same time? Well their popularity blew up on the tour, and a lot of young kids and a lot of women and started seeing them. I think we more have the crowd of drunk dudes who sit around in their underwear in the dark and drink beer and watch QVC, I think that's more our niche! They were a lot of fun to tour with though.

Q: What was your songwriting process like on this record? I know you and Chris have very distinctive songs and styles, almost like a modern-day Husker Du arrangement. Are they collaborative or do you work on them on your own?

B: Chris (bass) and I both have machines that we record stuff on. I sort of worked on lyrics and music on my own and put down the songs on my machine, and Chris did pretty much the same thing, and then we exchange our tapes and learn the songs. Then Chris and I got together and rehearse the songs acoustically to learn all of the changes. Then we get together at the practice space with Neil (drummer.) There we just totally transformed the songs, once everything was all electric and everyone knew all of the chords and all of the changes. At that point we took it all in the studio with Matt Alison to lay all the shit down and get things as precise as possible. Matt really helped us out a lot to produce the record well. He offered a lot of suggestions and was really like a 4th member in the studio. He even laid down guitar parts at the end of one of the songs, and everything turned out really cool. It was like any other record we've done, but we took about 4 times the amount of time we usually take to do it, and it really paid off.

Q: One of my favorite old songs of yours is "Here Comes the Neighborhood," which is a song about gentrification.

B: That song is about Wicker Park, which is this neighborhood, which was kind of like a family neighborhood, but...I guess a shitty family neighborhood, because there were a lot of gang bangers and stuff. Then the hipsters moved in, white kids came in, lived there, put up their boutiques and pushed all of the families out. But another neighborhood that happened to before Wicker Park was this one we're in right now, Wrigleyville. Back in the old days this was the neighborhood where all of the prostitutes hung out, it was a very mixed race neighborhood, low income. My 39 year old mom moved here with me when I was 9. I was on the last wave of this neighborhood becoming gentrified. And that's "Here Comes the Neighborhood" right there, when a white mom moves here with her kid. I have not really avoided the problem. Wicker Park just makes me sick. As I got older, I'd run into people and they'd ask me where I lived and I'd say the North Side. I grew up on the North Side, I've always lived here. And they'd look at me and say "Well, I'm from Wicker Park." It's like, dude fuck you, you're from... Iowa. *I'M* from the North Side. Maybe it's a snobby, elitist thing, just like the snobbiness goes on in Wicker, but I never wanted to be part of a place that wasn't a neighborhood, but that's just a scene. It's too much like "*he Real World* down there.

Q: That's literally true, now. (A season was filmed in Wicker Park.)

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B: Yeah, and that pissed me off when they filmed here, too, because where do you think these Wicker Park people got the bright idea to move into a loft in a bohemian section of town? Watching *The Real World*, eight seasons ago!

Q: Here we are talking about Chicago again!

B: Well, that might be a reason why Lawrence Arms is bigger in Chicago than anywhere else. I mean, you can appreciate our band from wherever you happen to live, but there is a lot of Chicago in our music. You can see the city in our songs, the names of streets, the neighborhoods, the places, all the time. On the other hand... I'd rather be a medium-sized band everywhere in the country, than be massively huge in Chicago and unknown everywhere else.

Q: There are a lot of local bands that are in that situation. They're huge here but they're unknown outside of the area.

B: Exactly. Bands like the Meshugganas, Oblivion, Apocalypse Hoboken, all these amazing, amazing bands that just, situationally, could never really do it. They could never seem to go on tour and become national acts, even though they had the talent and potential to be enormous bands. All three of those bands could have been as big or bigger than any of my bands, if they only would have been able to get out there and travel and have someone get behind them. Chicago's weird like that, it's so big and has such a great scene, but it's like a pabulum, you can be content doing really great here and never go anywhere else. It's kind of sad, a lot of great things tend to get old and rot around here.

Q: How's your experience been on Fat so far, as opposed to Asian Man (who released the first two L.A. records)?

B: Fat's great. The big difference is that now, a lot more people have heard about the band with all of the advertising that's been done. I don't have to spell out the name of the band anymore because the name is getting around. Both labels are run by huge guys names Mike who've been in and still are in big bands, and they're both interested in creating a family and having good relationships with the people in their bands. The big difference is in people: Fat's got 17 people who work there and Asian Man has 3, so a lot more gets done. A lot of people are pissed off that we're on Fat, and nobody was pissed off when we were on Asian Man. (Laughs.) Some people say we've sold out by going with Fat. I would tell those people to fucking eat my balls because that's the dumbest thing I've ever heard. Fat's a completely independent punk rock label run by punk rock musicians. He started a label to put out his own band and his friend's bands, and when you get pissed off because he's successful, fuck off. I know that their hearts are good and their ethics are pure, and I've never been so proud to be associated with a group of people like with Fat. You know, fuck, I grew up listening to NOFX and Mike's like a hero of mine. For him to like MY band, that's the coolest shit I can imagine.

Visit the band at www.thelawrencearms.net

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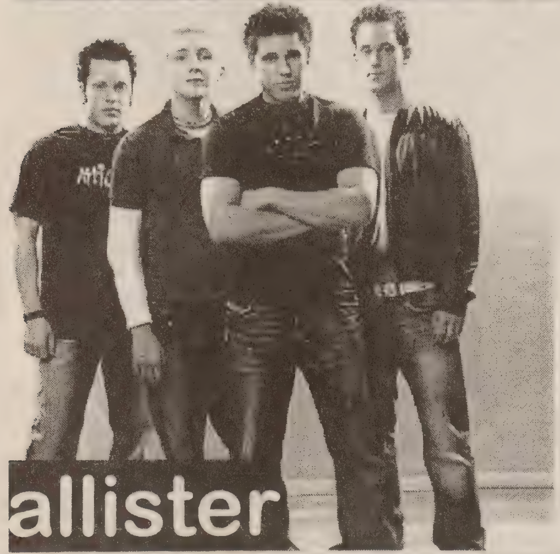

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Drive Thru Records has become synonymous with a certain kind of catchy, uptempo SoCal punk rock, so it may come as a surprise to learn that the broker-sister team who started and run the label actually come from New Jersey. This year, with their own Drive Thru Stage on the Warped Tour, bands like New Found Glory and Midtown jumping to mainstream access through Drive-Thru's relationship with NCA, and a roster that includes such highly-touted punk acts as Allister, Finch, Homegrown, Something Corporate, and The Starting Line, Drive Thru is one of the most important punk labels in the country. Thanks to label owners Stephanie and Richard Reines for this chat.

Interview by Phil Rainone

Q: How long has Drive Thru Records Been around?

Stefanie: We started the label in the summer of 1996, so that would be 6 years right about now.

Q: Can you give us some background on how you got started?

Stefanie: It's kind of a bunch of events leading up to starting the label...When richard was in college at NYU he began managing a band called Eve's Plum. Je got them signed to Sony, and the band embarked on their first U.S. tour. Richard moved to Los Angeles, and when Eve's Plum made it out there, they told Richard that they did a bunch of interviews across the country on cable access music shows. but, there were none in Los Angeles, which was the biggest market. So richard decided to start a cable access show called "Sideshow," and when I moved out to LA, I joined him. We interviewed bands, taped live shows, played videos, made videos...all for cool bands that were either somewhat underground or really underground. A bunch of people in the music industry began watching our show, and discovering bands because of us. We used to get taken out to lunch by major label a&r execs in return for playing bands for them. We thought we were fucking scoring by getting a free lunch (we had no money at the tim) and getting to promote bands we loved. Eventually, bands we were playing for people began to get signed, and then they began to get big. Our good friend Loren Israel (who brought Jimmy Eat World and Less Than Jake to Capitol) said..."fuck this! You need to start your own label and just do it yourselves." We thought it was a great idea, and so Drive-Thru records was born.

Richard: We were so poor and owed a ton of money in student loans, had shitty part time jobs and the prospect of actually starting a label was really scary. I said to Stefanie that we should try and save up some money so we can do things the right way. Stefanie said "fuck it" and we decided to wing it. We had to be VERY creative how we shifted money around so we could afford to pay for things that we did. We would delay paying the CD manufacturer as long as possible while we tried to sell cds at shows to pay the bill. It was pretty difficult, and by the third release we were runing out of places that would do business with us without us paying them upfront. It sucked. We also decided not to pay our student loans, which completely fucked up our credit. To this day, we both have shitty credit. Oh, well...fuck Sallie Mae!!!

Q: How is it working as brother & sister? (I don't know of many other labels run by siblings, or even many brother/sister teams in the music business). How did you influence each other when you were younger with music?

Stefanie: It's funny how people think it's so weird that we can work together. We share a house, too. I think it's weird that brothers and sisters don't get along! We've always got along really well, have almost the exact same taste in music, movies, etc. It works perfectly, because we hardly ever disagree and we completely trust one another. Neither of us would ever have to worry about the other being sneaky or sketchy. As an aside...there are a bunch of sibling teams in film, and they rule - the Coen brothers, Owen & Luke Wilson (and Owen is a fucking genius), Wes and Eric Anderson (of course, Wes is a genius, too). As far as music growing up, again, we basically had the same taste. It was all about Duran Duran, def leppard, Motley Crue, the Cure, Depeche Mode, the Jesus And Mary Chain, the Psychedellic Furs, Cyndi Lauper, the Alarm and Bob Dylan.

Richard: It is weird how our tastes are so similar, but it really works out well. We both have to agree 100% to sign a band.

Q: Have either of you been in a band?

Stefanie: We are both completely musically talentless. I tried to play violin, clarinet and flute in elementary school, but sucked at all three. When I was 16 I bought an acoustic guitar, learned some chords, but that was about it. Richard can't even strum a chord on the guitar. The fact that our musical (lack of) ability is so horrendous makes us appreciate bands even more. I'm amazed that people have the ability to write great songs.

Richard: I took two drum lessons and it was a joke. I didn't want to play on a fucking practice pad, so I gave up. People have tried to teach me some chords on a guitar, and I am so terrible it is embarassing.

Q: Who was the first band signed by your label?

Stefanie: Riverfenix was the first band we signed, but their CD was actually the 3rd Drive-Thru release ever.

Q: How do you find new bands?

Stefanie: Allister is one of the bands who has been on the label the longest. We found them through a demo they sent to the label.

Richard: Actually, they kept sending demos and they kept getting better. Eventually we wanted to put out their first 7 inch. Their new songs were even better, and we loved them enough to sign them. We didn't have any money then, and we recorded their whole CD *Dead Ends And Girlfriends* for $600. Our friend worked at a recording studio and we snuck in at nights and when the boss was on vacation. They have been touring on that cd for SUCH a long time, because they wanted to finish college before committing 100% to the band. At the time, we had no money, we couldn't really give tour support, etc so we were fine with that. They FINALLY will have a new CD out soon, and it is awesome.

Stefanie: The starting line's dream was to sign to Drive-Thru, so they did everything they could to get to us. They sought us out, and we loved them.

Richard: They used to email me, IM me, and talk to me all of the time. I thought they had potential, but we weren't interested in signing them. They evenutally signed to our friend's label, We The People, and came out to CA to meet the label and play for them. They wanted us to come and see them play, which we agreed to. They were MUCH better than their demo, but we still weren't over the top enough to sign the band. Then all of a sudden they started writing these AMAZING songs and we were just blown away. We are so happy that they kept in touch with us all along and we signed them. Their new CD is so awesome and we are so proud of them. Kenny played us some of their even newer songs which are so amazing, we can't wait for the next CD. We might even do an acoustic EP that we are talking with the band about.

Stefanie: As for Finch...Randy from the band has been a fan of the label since he was around 14. He would call the office and e-mail us all the time, and send us demos from all of his different bands. We never really liked any of them until one day, he called and asked if his new band could come up to LA and play for us. Richard went to see them as a favor, since Randy had been supporting the label for so long. We both fully expected them to suck, and we were completely shocked when they started playing. We offered them a deal on the spot.

Richard: Finch were definitely unexpected. When we signed them, they took a long time writing songs and playing shows and recording demos on their 4track in their living room. Finch would play shows with some local bands and sell one t-shirt. They would be all upset. We told them that kids might take a while to catch on to them since they were doing something different. Once kids started to catch on, the insanity began. The band were shocked that kids were showing up to all of their shows and going crazy. It is so exciting to watch that happen with a band. We still can't get over how amazing *What It is To Burn* turned out.

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Stefanie: One of our newest bands, The Early November (from NJ!), we found because the singer's girlfriend instant messaged Richard one day and asked if the band could play him their demo. It turned out that he was in NJ, they were from NJ, so they drove up to the hotel and played them their songs. He came home and played them for me, and we fell in love. They're an amazing band.

Q: Drive-Thru was heavily involved in the Asbury Park Surf & Skate festival earlier this year. Any comments?

Richard: Surf and Skate was amazing. The scene in NJ is amazing. When we grew up there, there was nothing even close to it. I wish there was a great music scene back then. We used to see shows at Rutgers once in a while and New Brunswick basement shows, the Melodly Bar, etc. but nothing like they have now. I don't even know anywhere else in the country that young kids book their own shows in VFW halls, firehouses, etc. It is incredible that kids are that ambitious, and the shows are great! Back to Surf and Skate, I think it was awesome to be able to have all of our bands play that show. They all played for free because we told everyone how amazing the scene is out there and it would be great to play in front of all of those kids. The bands didn't need any convincing, and they all had an amazing time. I can't thank eveyone in NJ enough for all of the support they have given our bands since the early days. Heath Miller and Concerts East have been hooking us up, even when our bands are tiny, and weappreciate it.

Q: Drive Thru was heavily involved in this summer's Warped Tour. Can you talk a little about that?

Stefanie: Well, we had our own stage which is pretty involved! This is the first time a label has ever had their own stage and it has been incredible. We went to a bunch of shows, and it's amazing how many kids are coming out to support our label and our bands. So many people are just at our stage all day, which blows my mind considering all of the bands on the tour! I love it!

Q: You went to Rutgers & grew up in Jersey. How does it compare to California?

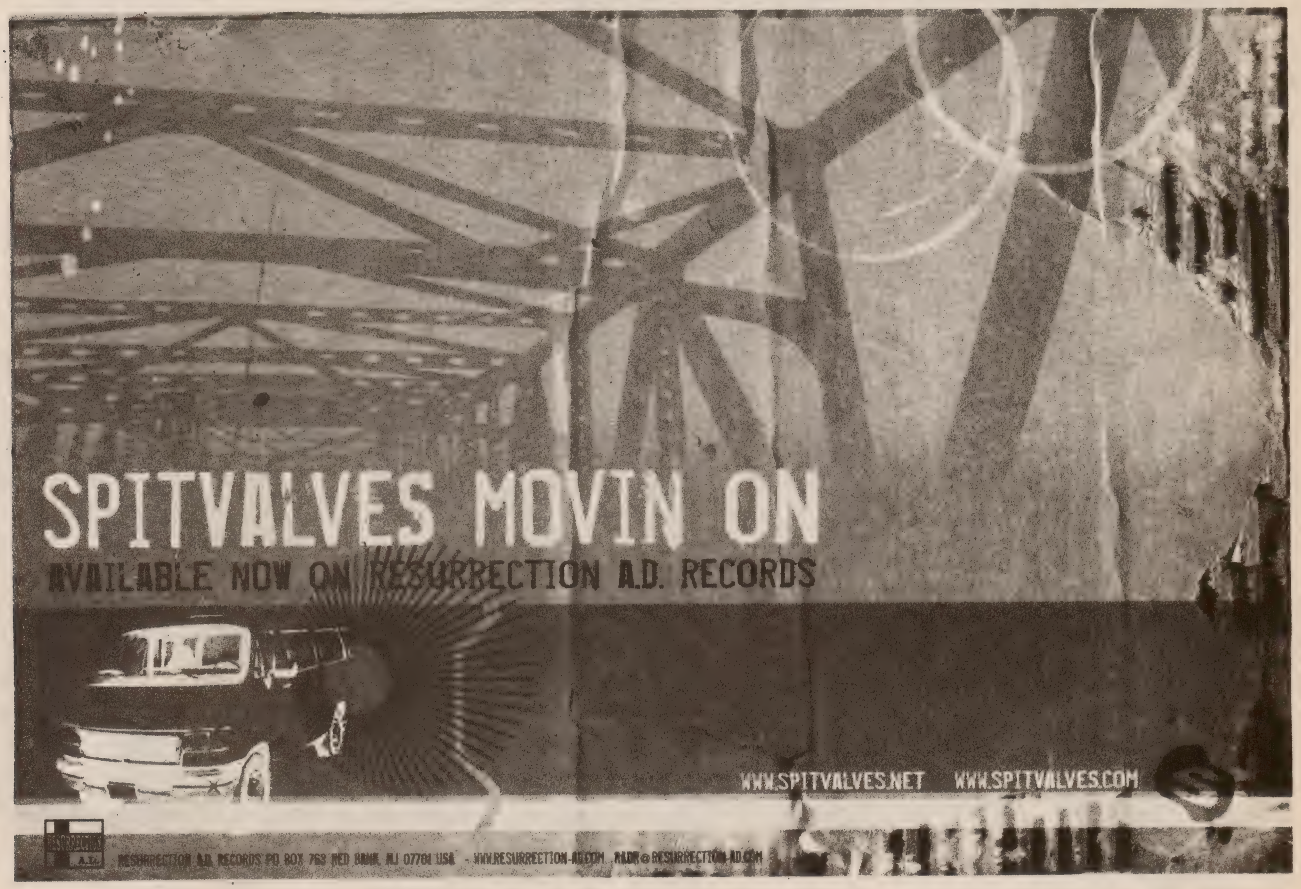
Stefanie: I loved Rutgers. I really had a great time there and was lucky enough to meet some great friends, and get a few incredible professors. And NJ is my home. We're both thrilled to have grown up in NJ. The educational system is better and the East Coast made us angry, aggressive, sarcastic, honest and blunt. Most people in california just aren't like that. But, I love the weather and the mountains and palm trees. Every day feels like I'm on vacation. I really do love living here, but am glad I grew up out there. As far as the music scene and starting a label goes... I don't think we would have been able to get as far as we have as quickly as we have back in NJ. The "so-cal punk" scene wasn't happening there, and 6 years ago bands like Thursday, Saves The Day, etc weren't really around (as far as I knew, anyway). California was just the right place at the right time.

Q: Any thing you would like to add?

Stefanie: Thank you so much to the amazing nj kids for supporting our bands more than anywhere else! NJ shows are the best!

Richard: I definitley want to add a few things. Once again, thank you to everyone who supports our bands and our label, it is the best feeling in the world to know that we are actually making a difference. We really run our label like a family and we stay close to the bands and the kids who support us and it is so awesome that so many people realize that and become a part of it. I wish the whole music scene had that vibe rather than the negativity that seems to be dominant. People have to bring you down, insult you, treat you like shit if they don't agree with something. It is everything that the scene should be against, and claims to be against. I am so tired of the kids that loved ska, then punk, then emo, now grow out their hair, wear tight shirts, trucker hats, and aviator glasses, and think they superior to everyone around them. Why do those people have to turn their backs on their past and turn into judgemental pricks? I am really glad the kids who listen to our bands that we have met, are so much more down to earth. If we can change that bullshit vibe as much as possible, I will be really happy. Fuck elitists.

Keep up with Drive-Thru Records at www.drivethrurecords.com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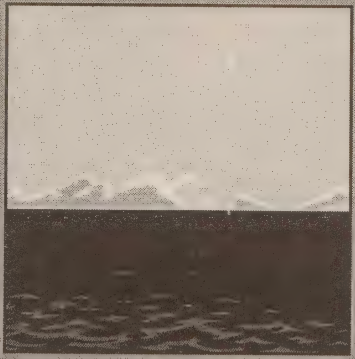

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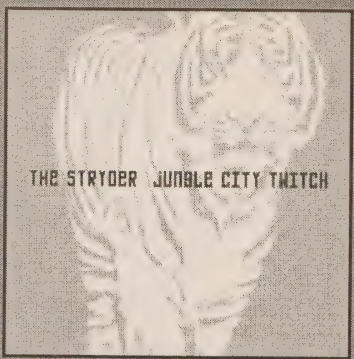
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by Jason Schreurs

Anarchist Emma Goldman would have dug Vancouver, BC hardcore band Submission Hold. If Goldman couldn't dance to it, it wasn't her revolution, so she could have appreciated the band's dedication to spreading messages, as well as their ability to bust out a punk rock polka tune.

The stringent do-it-yourselfers in Submission Hold have promoted the merits of solidarity for the better part of ten years. After almost 15 tours (including Europe three times) and countless releases — their latest being Sackcloth and Ashes: The Ostrich Dies on Monday on Ebullition Records — the band have kept their message clear.

"The theme we try to push is one of respect, empathy and compassion," says guitarist Stephe Flach. "It's about not creating hierarchies, whether they're in our personal lives or in the larger society. It's a very simple message, we try to approach it from a number of different angles, but that seems to be the overlying thread that ties it all together."

Throughout the years, the band has done many benefit shows for organizations whose efforts they support. As Stephe says, "The majority of the local shows we do have been benefits. We've played Rock for Choice, we've done a lot of benefits for groups that are organizing stuff in Vancouver, like Mayday, Food Not Bombs or the Under the Volcano festival. When we tour, sometimes we wind up doing benefits -- people just check with us beforehand. We've done benefits in Italy for political prisoners, and we actually put out a CD in South America for political prisoners. It was old demos that someone wanted to put out as a CD and all of the proceeds went to Anarchist Black Cross."

Time has also brought musical maturity to the band; elements of punk, classical, jazz and folk (to name a few) result in a sound that would have most old school punks scratching their mohawks.

"We take whatever we're into at the time and put it in a big blender and see what comes out," says Stephe. "There's obviously a lot of punk rock in there because that's how [bassist] Andy and I learned how to play music. Jen did years of classical voice training when she was younger, so that works its way in there. We listen to a lot of different kinds of music right across the board. European folk music has been a bit of an influence, classical music — we all enjoy string music and a bit of orchestral music at times. Jen likes musicals, so we occasionally have little references to musicals in our songs. We've been listening to jazz and free improv music as well lately." This wide variation of musical styles forms a sound unlike any other band in the hardcore scene. As Stephe describes, the sounds of Submission Hold are all over the place.

"We do some very soft, mellow, sad stuff to very loud, angry stuff to jumpy, circus-y sounding stuff. It's a bit of a rollercoaster ride. We try to express all the things that we feel. We've also been working in the different elements of whatever we're listening to. We hear something we like, in whatever style of music, and we see if we can do some horrible, bastardized version of that and make it work in the context of what we do. We wind up with some strange stuff going on, and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. We wind up throwing a lot of ideas away because they don't work."

The band is currently working on some songs with new drummer Kenton Loewen after returning from three-week tours of the West Coast and Europe. "We've been trying to find our songwriting process and it seems to be clicking now. We've figured out how we're writing songs together."

Loewen, a jazz/improv drummer, joined after the departure of longtime member Phil Roth in October of 2001. Roth left the band to focus on art and making jewelry. "The band takes up so much time and energy. He wanted to focus on his career and he wasn't able to put the necessary time into that. We bought his drum kit off of him, just so we'd have a kit, but also we're hoping maybe at some point he'll come to his senses and want his drum kit back, and we'll sell it back to him for what we paid for it," laughs Stephe.

Another big change came when vocalist Jen Thorpe and bassist Andy Healey made a special addition to the band — their baby, Sam, who recently turned one year old. "The baby is very mellow and he's a fun guy to hang out with and we all love him. Everybody in the band is spending a lot of time with him and he's comfortable with all of us. He hears us practice, obviously he's not in the room with us, but we practice in the basement and he will be upstairs. He seems to like our music. Sam also opened for Fugazi in the womb," Flach points out, referring to show the band played in Vancouver when Jen was eight months pregnant.

Since the baby goes on the road with the band now, baby-proofing their haphazard tours of old was a priority, with better touring schedules, a van that isn't duct taped together, and a nanny and roadie/mechanic in tow. As Stephe explains, "We've definitely made some changes in how we are touring to accommodate him. We're doing shorter tours -- right now we are not doing more than three weeks -- we're taking more days off, trying to book shorter drives between shows. We used to be really hardcore and be like, 'Okay, we're finished the show, it's midnight, let's get in the van and drive all night and we'll sleep in a parking lot,' you know. We've done a lot of that and it's not conducive to travelling with a child, and parents, for that matter — the exhaustion factor."

Submission Hold is, first and foremost, a political band. With government cutbacks to social services deeply affecting many residents on Canada's west coast, people's ears are opening to music that criticizes the government and looks for alternatives to the current system.

"I think it makes people more receptive," says Stephe. "What I've observed is a lot of people who normally don't identify themselves with politics are suddenly becoming very politicized; through whatever unions they are in or just because of how these different cutbacks are affecting their personal lives. People want to hear that message in the music because it validates what they are feeling if they are hearing it through other mediums. At the same time, we play a style of music that's a little bit different than the stuff that's usually got the political message which is often very aggressive and heavy, and it's always angry or whatever. Because things are so negative right now on the political front, unless you are a wealthy person, I think people want to enjoy themselves when they are out being entertained. They are angry and politicized in their personal lives and they don't necessarily want to be listening to this really heavy message. We're delivering a message but you can also dance to our music."

It's an important time for the band to be outspoken and active, he says. "It's a really important time for everybody to be rallying together. We have been trying to make an effort to be musically involved, in addition to other involvement we have in different demonstrations and struggles. We've been trying to get involved in some of the more political music events that are going on, and we've offered ourselves up to play at demonstrations and things like that."

Despite their dislike for the current government, Stephe doesn't consider Submission Hold a protest band. "I've never thought of us in those terms, but in previous bands we were in and maybe at the beginning of this band that was maybe the case. What we are doing now, musically and lyrically, is just an extension of who we are as people and what we believe as people. We've been trying to put a lot more emphasis on being pro-active and writing about what we're for and what we observe, rather than writing about what we're against in protest because that's ultimately reactionary. It's a good critique but you're ultimately not really in control if you are just reacting to everything."

Submission Hold are a rare kind of band; not only have they stuck it out for almost a decade, they've managed to progress musically and increase their following without sacrificing their integrity along the way. Stephe explains how they've maintained their no-nonsense approach; "Probably because we do it just because we enjoy doing it. Part of the reason we started playing music was to connect with people in a way that we had connected with music, politically and emotionally, in order to create that for other people. Not to say that can't be done through mainstream channels, but the focus has always been about us enjoying what we are doing and feeling good about what we are doing, and trying to reach people on a personal level through the music. The bands that we respect are bands that have managed to retain that integrity as well."

The band shows no signs of slowing down or running out of ideas, he says. "We enjoy what we're doing; it's therapeutic for us to do. We're all friends, we like hanging out together, we'd hang out regardless of whether we're playing music together. It's just logical for us to keep doing it. We enjoy songwriting and we continue to keep expanding musically, so it's not like we are stuck in a box or anything."

For more information about Submission Hold, write to PO Box 21533, 1850 Commercial Dr., Vancouver, BC, V5N 4A0, Canada or check out their website at www.tao.ca/~submissionhold/

Photos by Shawn Scallen

SASHA ALCOTT AND THE POSSIBILITIES - Demo (www.sashaalcott.com) Bubbly retro indie pop. It's bubbly, bouncy, happy sounding stuff, uptempo and all that. It's retro in that it sounds a little garage-like, and the cuts sound like they come from different eras (the first track from the late 60s, the second is kind of new wave 80s, and the fourth is sort of punk 80s. It's fairly decent stuff here and shows promise. - Paul Silver

ALL SYSTEMS GO – "Species American" EP (ASGNation@hotmail.com) If the shirtless dude in the baggy shorts didn't give it away, Wilmington, North Carolina's All Systems Go are a skatepunk band. That means growly aggro vocals, gnarly metal riffs, and hyperspeed tempos. The playing here – speedy, powerful, heavy - is as impressive as a double grind wheelie on a vert ramp (whatever the fuck that is.) Go extreme. – Jim Testa

THE ATOMIC MISSILES – "Flying For Victory" (www.atomicmissiles.com) I had always pigeonholed NJ's Atomic Missiles as a mohawk'd old-school hardcore band, for some reason. When I got this CD, I realized that although I see their name all over the place – on fliers, the Internet, etc. – I'd never actually heard them. So it was a pleasant surprise to discover that this is actually quite an eclectic act, whose songs range from short blasts of lo-fi noisecore to extended trippy shoegazer jams... although most of what they do best sounds like the Bouncing Souls' Oi! Influenced punk fortified with big crunchy Who-ish powerchords and snotty punk vocals. And talk about timely: "Marching To Baghdad" with its acoustic guitar backing and thoughtful lyrics could be the next punk anti-war anthem when we finally invade Iraq. These guys are also the current kings of DIY in the New Brunswick scene, constantly putting on and promoting shows (I get all the emails, I just never get to the shows.) Dammit, I gotta see these guys soon! -- Jim Testa

BLAST4ME (www.angelfire.com/indie/blast4me) A "one-manned punk band" or so it says on the website. The opening instrumental, "Everything Will Turn Out Alright Ok" is a bouncy little number that combines punk-rock guitars with bouncy upbeat drum-machine programming. "Sick Of Boredom" has a catchy Screeching Weasel melody and raspy punk vocals along with the programmed beats. "Gorey Night" brings us back to the heart of Misfits territory, from the theme to the heavy reverby monster-mash production. So far, so cool. But an awful lot of this 12-song disc is terrible lo-fi crap that sounds like it was recorded on a Walkman in the Jerry Only's basement. Uneven vocals, really bad production, and some truly dumb songs. The lesson here is that it's not enough to Do It Yourself; "Edit Yourself" is a good rule too, and don't go burning every half-baked idea you have onto a CD-R and giving it to the first rock critic you bump into. – Jim Testa

BONA ROBA – "This Is Your Brain" EP (www.nealmusic~yahoo.com) A smoothly rolling & fiercely cooking 3-song EP blast of pure snotty pop-punk swaggering. You know the drill with this kinda lowdown gritty, dirt-caked, phlegm-choked racket: Sneering vocals spit out nastily, lascivious lyrics with venomous aplomb, while the diggin' guitars, slithery basslines, and savagely incessant piston-pumpin' drums crackle up an ominously rumbling sonic storm. Okay, so it's nothing terribly original or ground-breakin it still does the satisfyingly sleazoid no-nonsense trash rock trick just the same. – Jim Testa

MIKE RAMEK '01

DEMOS

DOUGLAS LEADER – "God Bless Virgins" (www.douglasleader.com) Douglas Leader are a Brooklyn pop-punk band with horns. Although they let you know in no uncertain terms that they are NOT a ska band (despite the horn section,) I could easily imagine Reel Big Fish doing a bouncy number like "Euclid Westcott". They've also got songs about girls ("Della") and, well, girls ("God Bless Virgins," " We Are So Much In Love.") The punky raw vocals let you know that no one's taking this too seriously, the guitars never get in the way of the songs, and they're in no way emo, which right there is a reason to go out and support them. – Jiim Testa

ELECTRIC ENGINE (timr1372@aol.com) Electric Engine is a new Brooklyn trio composed of two ex-Moths and one ex-Highwaters. Guitarist Tim Reidy takes the lead vocal on "Step By Step," with chimey U2 guitars and that deadpan ironic vocal style that just seems to be grinning at you even when he's being sincere. On the more twangy "Who Needs Friends," bassist Tom Rigney takes the lead vocal, on a smart-alecky track that recalls the Moths at their most sardonic (nobody writes good drinking songs anymore, but here's one to cry in your beer with.) Solid drumming by Joe Dessereau anchors everything nicely. Hopefully this is just a taste of things to come. – Jim Testa

INTERNATIONAL BRUNCH MUMMIES – "Location-Meal-Monster" (brunchmummies@yahoo.com) Ex-Adrenalin OD guitarist Bruce Wingate fronts this punky trio from Connecticut. There is plenty of Buzzcocks buzz and hyper-caffeinated power-pop fizz on this catchy 11-song CD-R. Bruce sings in a high Pete Shelley-ish voice with a mock British accent, and in fact, a lot of this reminds me of New Jersey's own faux-Britpunks The Anderson Council. Like AOD, the Brunch Mummies have a sense of humor (with that name, how could they not?), as evidenced on their theme song "New Caucasian Pop Sensation." Bruce and pals get a room full of little kids to sing about the joys of the public library on "Library Place" and unapologetically stakes out his turf as a power-popster on "Reinvent Yourself." Put this trio on a bill with Sux (the Jersey buzzcore band that features Paul and Jack from AOD) and you'd have a bill that'd blow away four-fifths of the young whippersnappers around right now. – Jim Testa

LAMONT SKYLARK -*Hand-Off Volume One* (lincoln@mosquitamite.com) 4 song Demo CD This one is really quite good. 3 guys, drums, guitar and bass. Countrified rock or rocking Country. Rock-a-billy lives! Slightly different styles on the 4 tunes, ballad to flat out rock-a-billy. Very good debut. Very promising band. So, guys, do a full length release and send it to me. – Rodney Leighton

THE METHOD & RESULT (9410 Meadowbrook Ave. Philadelphia PA 19118; www.canarypromo.com) Megan and Mason, that's all you have to know. Megan has one of the most stunning voices to come along since Amy Jacob of Prosolar Mechanics, the kind of angelic, otherworldly voice you hear in those Britpop shoegazer combos like Morcheeba. Those luscious vocals are accompanied by dreamy pop tapestries (Mason plays guitar, bass, and various synthesizers) and inventive, tasty sampling. It's electro-pop at its best; they can even make getting older seem desirable (on the creamy "One Year Closer To Retirement.") Watch for a full-length, they've got a sound that will not be denied. – Jim Testa

MURDER WEAPON (Wm. Van Huss, 209 Seward Ave. Bristol VA 24201) Nothing outstanding here, but if you like raunchy rock 'n' roll with a bluesy, Iggy-esque swagger, Ramones (circa "Commando") guitars, and a Misfits-like penchant for sci-fi/monster lyrics (song titles: "Flaming Creatures," "Science," "Wages Of Sin,") you could do a lot worse. – Jim Testa

NEGATIVE NINE (www.negativenine.com) I know you're not supposed to judge a book by its cover, but when you go to a band's website and all you see are big beefy shirtless guys with hair down past their shoulders in black leather pants, you start to get an idea of what you're in for. Nineties grunge-metal forms the basic template here; boomy vocals, heavy guitars, funk inflections on a couple of tracks, the obligatory acoustic power ballads, fist-shaking angst dripping off every lyric. Anyone anxiously wondering where the next Nickelback is coming from should immediately seek these guys out.

CHRIS PIERSON – "The White Demo" (rock@angrymonsters.com) Chris Pierson was something of a fixture in the New Brunswick scene of the late 90's (a period that I'm quickly beginning to think of as "The Good Old Days,") fronting two bands, Angry Monsters and Velour 44. Then he graduated from college, got a job, and pretty much disappeared from public view. These demos mark his first forays back into music, and I am happy to report that underneath that yuppie façade beats the heart of the same slaphappy kid in the baggy shorts who used to wheeze and croak about girls and fast cars in his pop-punk days. Some of the tracks on this demo are only song fragments or unfinished ideas for fully-developed tracks, but "Medicine & Time," "You'll Be There To React," and "Wake Up" show the same gift for inspired wordplay and catchy hooks, and the same exuberant, jumping- out-of-his-shoes zeal in his vocals that made his old bands so much fun. Chris, 25 ain't too old to rock 'n' roll, trust me. And New Jersey needs you. Welcome back. – Jim Testa

RED ANIMAL WAR / SLOWRIDE – Split Cassette Promo (Deep Elm Records, P.O. Box 36939, Charlotte, NC, 28236) Red Animal War starts things off with a song that might've happened if U2 jammed with Tool--nice balancing act! If I had to pick their single, it would definitely be that one, "77." The next track they offer is generic, forgettable, fast college rock, but they redeem themselves quickly and totally with another genre-spanner "Modus Operandi." Slowride better hustle--there probably isn't a lot of room left to ride on Blink 182's coattails, or time for that matter. Thumbs up to Red Animal War for offering something handcrafted, thumbs down to Slowride for churning out more fluff from commercial rock's assembly-line. - Mike C.

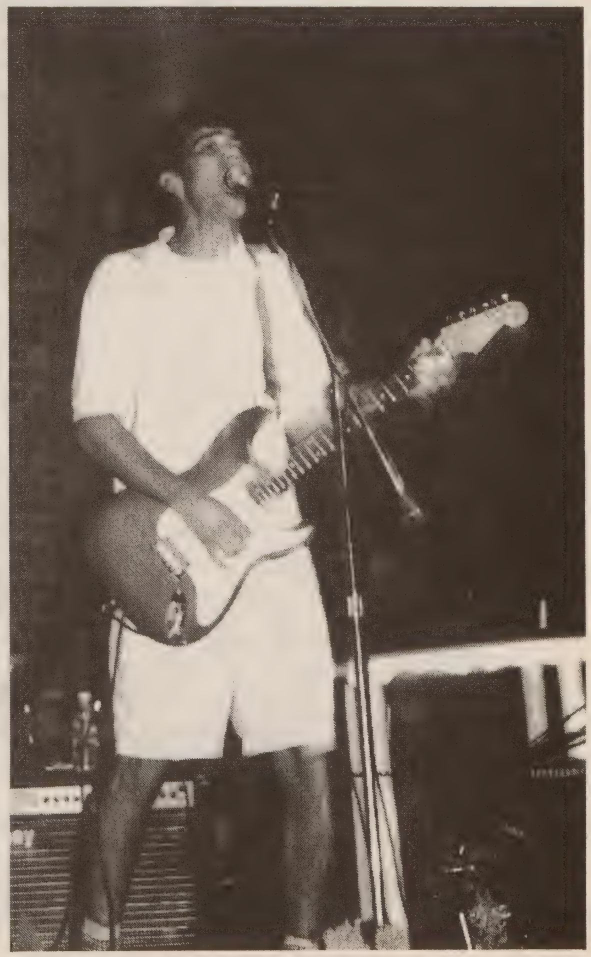
SLUSHPUPPY - 3 song EP (www.slushpuppyrocks.com) Back in April I was talking with my sister's insufferably shitwitted do-nothing sluggard husband about Slushpuppy. I explained in de they're this really smokin' band with a raw, gritty, hard-edged rockin' sound. I also staunchly stated how I abhor comparing one band to another one, describing that deplorable practice as a prime example of hack criticism. My sister's husband, irritating prick that he is, made one of his classic annoying blunders by then asking me if Slushpuppy sounded like early Zeppelin. I emphatically answered that they most certainly do not, telling his stupidness that Slushpuppy is much better than that. This characteristically smolderin' and tautly melodic 3-song slab of pure sonic POW! firmly consolidates Slushpuppy's sterling status as one on-the-money outfit. I just hope that they get around to a full-length album sometime soon; I'm sure it will be a killer. – Joe Wawyrzniak

TOMMIE GRIGGZ / GRETA HOTMER (www.geocities.com/tommiegriggzwebsite) Tommie Griggz is a 10-year old pop-punk band from South Jersey featuring guitarist/singer Tim Gregory and pretty much whomever he talks into being in the band that week. Despite many lineup changes, the band's had a pretty constant sound – gritty, catchy, funny pop-punk. Now, Tim has teamed up with 19-year old Greta Hotmer and a new rhythm section who come from funk and hip-hop, not funk. Tim sent me one untitled song on a CDR, a pretty midtempo ballad with acoustic guitars and Greta's lovely vocals. It's completely un-Tommie Griggz-like – soft, gently rocking pop that would feel right at home programmed between Joan Osborne and Sheryl Crow. It will be interesting to see if this goes anywhere. (And hey Tim, if you had gotten this girl to sing those Tommie Griggz pop-punk numbers, Greta could've been Avril Lavigne.) – Jim Testa

TONIGHT WE ESCAPE - Demo (www.tonightweescape.com) This is one of those cool surprises that sometimes happens at shows. While covering the Warped Tour in Camden, a band (that wasn't on the bill), was giving away demos. I usually operate under the premise of, 'If it's for free, it's for me,' or something along those lines. Anyway, this 2 song demo by Tonight We Escape has a good, quality sound (Recorded at Sound Investments Studios, Scrantion, Pa.). "Dating Could Be Deadly," a song about that first serious relationship, has a melodic, alternative sound. "Tune In, Turn On" has passionate lyrics and again, is catchy and melodic. The demo does it's job. It leaves the listener wanting more! Check out their web site to get the demo and for live dates. - Phil Rainone

THE VANITIES – 10 song CD (1751 Kimberly Dr. Wall NJ 07719; www.thevanities.net) This Asbury Park-based group uses the word schizophrenic to describe itself, and it fits. The band brings an absurdist theatricality and a complete disregard for traditional genre boundaries – they mix jazzbo improvisations with funk horn parts with Mothers Of Invention dissonant craziness with metal with punk with ska with... Well, you get the picture. Fans of the unpredictable (Mr. Bungle is the obvious comparison) might dig this; I'd like to see these guys take some Ritalin and settle down a bit, this was way too hyperactive for my tastes. – Jim Testa

AARON WILKINSON (boobetz@hotmail.com) I'm the worst audience in the world for acoustic folk songs. Unless the lyrics just jump out and grab me by the throat, I tend to lose interest in this kind of music quickly. Happily, Aaron Wilkinson held my attention through these four tracks, with his deep vocals, strummed acoustic, and some simple accompaniment. "City Ditty" is a Loudon Wainwright meditation on being an ordinary guy; "Just A Man," with its harmonica bridge and introspective verses, has a Dylanesque edge. "Haystack" and "Cheyenne" reveal the countryish side of Mr. Wilkinson's personality. "Haystacks" has a bluesy Delbert McClinton swagger and "Cheyenne" sounds like a Gordon Lightfoot cover. I wish this CD had more with it than just an email address. If there was a website, I'd definitely check it out it for more information on this guy. – Jim Testa



Chris Pierson (back in the good old days)

Johnny Puke's Wide World Of Punk

ADZ – *American Steel* (Steel Cage Records, PO Box 29247, Philadelphia PA 19125) ADZ is the current project for former (now occasional) Adolescents frontman Tony Reflex. This is a lot less SoCal punk than the Adolescents, with more emphasis on rock riffs than punk beats, owing more to Chuck Berry than Black Flag. Although this was apparently recorded on ProTools for next to nothing, you'd hardly know it as everything is clear and mixed well. I guess my only complaint would be that it's painfully obvious Tony Reflex has plumbed the depths of punk-related song subjects and gives us Dr. Seuss-like nonsense such as "Dr. Rat And Dan The Bowl" or "Mama Married A Mau Mau." Tony, what if you died tomorrow, dude? Would you want someone to say that the last song you recorded was called "Kiss My Fuzzface"?

ARMY OF PONCH (No Idea, Box 14636, Gainesville FL 32604) Somewhere between emo and math-core, Army of Ponch play slow, heavy, and intricate yet unpredictable songs. Vocals alternate between quiet melodic parts and incomprehensible yapping. Eleven songs in all with long, complicated titles like "Why Don't We Meet Tonight, We'll Sit On The Porch And Swing With Our Cans Raised High Arm In Arm Swinging Side To Side."

CRIMSON SWEET – "So Electric" 7-inch EP (Slow Gold Zebra, PO Box 20506, NYC 10009) This A Side, "So Electric," has an edgy new wave sound, while the flip, "No Hot On Cold," is a more aggressive garage number. All in all, a good effort from this local female-fronted trio. Gritty rock n roll.

THE BOOTY OLYMPICS – *Boystyle* (www.bootyolympics.com) In an era when the term "indie rock" has become a synonym for "can't sing/can't play," the Booty Olympics are refreshing. Sweet, competent harmonies, simply crafted songs that neither meander or come in underdeveloped, make *Boystyle* a treat. Rock critics who mistake someone like Kathleen Hanna's longevity for talent would behoove themselves to check out a band like the Booty Olympics.

THE B SIDES – *Yes, Indeed, The B Sides, Quite* (PO Box 136, Pittsboro NC 27312) Oh my God, look at the picture on the inside of this CD. These guys look like the A.V. Club of your local high school, or the Dungeons & Dragons geeks who work at the local hobby shop. Truth is, they're probably music students, judging by the predictably trite lyrics and Electric Light Orchestra-esque arrangements (too many canned strings and misused keyboards.) The good news is that this band hails from flood-prone Pittsboro, North Carolina... maybe they rehearse in a basement!

BROTHERS OF CONQUEST – *All The Colors Of Darkness* (Go Kart) It took me a few listens to this Southern rock/metal hybrid to decide if it wasn't some sort of Spinal Tap joke. I guess it's not. Unlike Alabama Thunderpussy, who combine the best elements of 70's metal and Southern rock to create a new and heavy whole, Brothers Of Conquest come off like a cliché, a bad metal band from New Jersey singing about "Hot Southern Nights." While they may go over big in Myrtle Beach during Biker Week, I can't imagine even the easily impressed among Jersey Beat readers would find this of much interest.

THE CONNIE DUNGS – "*Turntable" EP* (Mutant Pop) One of the indie label people I most respect is Tim from Mutant Pop, who now more than ever sticks to his guns and champions a style of punk that although still vibrant and viable, is about as popular among the trendy as West Nile Virus. Pop-Punk post-mortem holds few veterans in 2002 and The Connie Dungs are thankfully one of them. At one time, I questioned Tim's over-the-top gushing about this Kentucky band, but these guys have gotten lots better at playing as well as writing songs. So I guess I have come around to Tim's way of thinking that the Connie Dungs are pretty special and all of the seven songs here rock. I do however think the whole short-run CD format (these are basically CDR's in limited pressings to save manufacturing costs and allow Mutant Pop to release lots more bands than would be possible otherwise) borders on the crappy and I miss Mutant Pop's former less-financially-viable forte' of cool, collectible, colored-vinyl 7-inches and proper CD's.

THE CRIPPLES – *Dirty Head* (DirtNap Records, PO Box 21249, Seattle WA 98111) Dirty garagey New Wave with dual synths whose operators love to fuzz them out to the point of No Wave. Imagine a noisier Strangers with the disconnected vocals of The Fall.

DRUNK INJUNS – *From Where The Sun Now Stands, I Will Fight No More, Forever* (Alternative Tentacles) As someone who was a genuine skater punk in the early 80's, I can tell you that Drunk Injuns are just as much an acquired taste today as they were back in 1982-84. You'd really have to call this goth-punk today, and their costumes sure made this San Jose-based band stand out in a pre-GWAR era. This is the third installment in Alt Tentacles' skate-punk reissue series, and all the tracks here were engineered and mixed by the Guerrero Brothers (of Free Beer fame.) Bonus tracks include songs by post-Injuns band Ancestors: Gods Of Sound.

FACE TO FACE – *How To Ruin Everything* (Vagrant) Sometimes, a little success can be the worst thing for you. The word on the street when Face To Face comes up is "sell out" or "Blink 181" (that one actually made me laugh.) Truth is, Face To Face here is the same melodic Cal-Punk band they always were, with nary an indication of selling out or any sort of artistic compromise. If the poor guys had never had their brief blip on MTV's radar screen, a lot more punks would like this. While I've never been a particular Face To Face fan, I have to give them credit for their longevity and for staying true to their creative charter.

GLASSEATER (Fearless Records) A short album of 10 melodic hardcore songs with occasional bursts of overdrive metalcore in just under 30 minutes. The lyrics are so positive as to be almost Christian and the vocals are rich with harmonies (until the growly Cookie Monster parts.) The unique CD packaging is a plus.

THE GLORY HOLES – *Knock You Up* (Empty Records, PO Box 12034, Seattle WA 98012) In today's climate of indie-punk rockers drunk on the Hives, White Stripes, and the Strokes, the road is clear for a garage punk band with talent and tenacity like the Glory Holes. *Knock You Up* is a 15-song, 2 girl/3 guy primal punk rock romp, from "Cross To Bear" to "Big Fuckin' Rock Machine." Two guitars jam together on a Sonics type groove and the vocals evoke Chicago's Traitors, Austin's Motards, or any other pill-vox band. Engineered by legendary grunge producer Jack Endino and produced by ex-Big Boys Tim Kerr, *Knock You Up* is a choice punk pick. You like'a da Hives, you love'a da Glory Holes.

GROOVIE GHOULIES – *60 Stories* (Stardumb Records, Box 21145, 3001AC Rotterdam, The Netherlands) Conspicuously missing from this EP is longtime Ghoulie (and ex-Queer) B-Face, currently pursuing a Boston childhood fantasy of playing with punk pioneers The Real Kids. If you're a fan of the Ghoulies' upbeat, child-like, farm-league Ramones pop-punk, *60 Stories* offers more of what you've come to expect. Now a trio, with a two girls to one Kepi ratio, the 14 songs are catchy even if they are a bit too simple (musically and lyrically). But if one can suspend one's loftier musical aesthetics, there is fun to be had here. I guess kiddie punk bands like this appeal to people who think Anti-Flag makes them think too much. Also, you might want to check on how many of these tunes have already been released elsewhere. I know I've heard "Chupacabras" before...

GUTTERMOUTH – *Gusto* (Epitaph) At last, a full 14 song CD that really lives up to Guttermouth's potential! While a band of excellent musicians, Guttermouth's previous efforts have been marred by jokey gimmick songs and inside jokes galore. Here, the boys have concentrated on good old-fashioned punk songs with universal themes and dashes of wry humor. The first two songs here are two of the best songs I've ever heard from the band. It's about time... Recommended.

THE HEXTALLS – *Call It A Career* (Shredder Records) You'd have to be a complete 'tard not to guess these guys are from Canada, from all the hockey imagery in the packaging and strewn throughout these 13 songs. Some of these tunes don't make any sense (what does "shaking like Stevie Wonder" mean? He's blind, he's black, but he doesn't have Parkinsons...) and none of them are really exceptional. The production is kinda shoddy as well, all qualities shared by every Canadian act from Alanis Morissette to Chixdiggit. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that their government actually pays shitty bands to stay on welfare, thus subsidizing medocrity at every turn. Enjoy it while it lasts, guys. Maybe someday you'll be as big as Sloan or something.

JACKPOT -- *Shiny Things* (Surfdog Records, 1126 South Coast Hwy 101, Encinitas CA 92024) Apparently, the driving force behind this band, Rusty Miller, was some sort of 'almost was' as a member of Cake,which I'm not exactly sure my readers would consider a recommendation. I will say that *Shiny Things* is a great "alternative rock" album, if you take that term very literally. Jackpot are a laid-back rock band, much more to the point than, say, Cake or Soul Coughing. Miller can throw some good lines together without any pretense, and writes quality songs as good as any Goo Goo Dolls join on your local alt-rock radio station. For brief moments, Jackpot aspires to the greatness of songwriters like Mark Eitzel or Leonard Cohen, and at their worst, they're still at least as good as the Wallflowers.

KERMITS FINGER – *Jacques Jon Benet Bombshell* – 10" vinyl (Poorest Quality Records, PO Box 458, Boston MA 02129) This is fairly one-dimensional 1-2 thrash with growly vocals and funny song titles. Check out "Shit For Brains," "Puke On U," or the title referencing "Love Song (For A Dead Child.)" The big plus here is excellent packaging as well as the cool and distinctive 10-inch vinyl. Punk that's so punk it smells.

KUNG FU KILLERS – "Burning Bush" / "Werewolves In Our Youth" 7-inch EP (TKO Records) All of the band members listed have ridiculously jokey Oriental names (Hung Lo, Chow Maniac, etc.) but rumor has it there's an ex-Electric Frankenstein and an ex-Slap Of Reality among the Kung Fu Killers' ranks. This is Old School L.A. punk, kind of like a less catchy Adolescents. It's a sound that comes totally unexpected, as everything I've heard from TKO Records up to now has either been Oi! Influenced or AntiSeen. I'd love to hear a Kung Fu Killers full-length.

NO USE FOR A NAME -- *Hard Rock Bottom* (Fat Wreck Chords) A huge improvement over their last studio effort, *Hard Rock Bottom* has tight, gritty guitars, upbeat catchy songs, and rich melodies. I have taken this CD along on some beach trips and it is an excellent summer CD, rocking and unchallenging. The biggest criticism is that some of the lyrics are rife with cliches, predictable rhymes, and hokey love imagery. Thankfully, the catchiness of it all and Ryan Greene's smooth production can usually distract you from the sappiness. If you've ever been a fan of NUFAN, even if you were alienated by the misnamed *More Betterness*, you'll want to give this a try.

OFF BY ONE (LMC Records) Off by one... I guess that makes them Sum 40.

RANCID VAT – *The Cheesesteak Years* (Steel Cage Records, Box 29247, Philadelphia PA 19125) Originally formed in the Northwest ages ago, Rancid Vat are now beginning a new phase in their "career" (that they've always kinda sucked is what makes them so charming) as the married couple that is the band's core are moving to Texas to start over with a new lineup and frontman. Although he has a monotonous and oddly canine voice, it will be hard to replace Cosmo, the flamboyant and humorous lead singer during the band's Philadelphia period (mid 90's to present.) The band sings derogatory songs like "Old People" yet Cosmo is almost old enough to be a grandfather to much of the Vat's audience. They also poke fun at fat people in "Blobs Have More Fun" yet Cosmo, as well as guitarist Phil Irwin, both look as if they may have eaten entire adolescent children. *The Cheesesteak Years* contains 16 songs, all previously released, including covers of AntiSeen and Black Oak Arkansas. Good luck, Phil and Maria. We can't wait to see Rancid Vat fronted by a Texan!

RANDY – *Cheater* (G-7 Welcoming Committee, Box 27006, L-360 Main St. Winnipeg MB 1R3C-4T3 Canada) Almost every song on this 6-song EP has a different influence but holds together as a pretty cool body of work from this Swedish quartet. Overdriven vocals and bass deficient production give the CD a garage-like feel, especially on the title track. "Addicts Of Communication" is a straight up British punk number not unlike Sham 69, while "Dynamite" is a slower, more traditional 60's punk song.The mod sounds become most apparent on "Sleeping Out," a different mix of which appears on a Fat Wreck Chords 7-inch. Now signed to Burning Heart/Epitaph, Randy will probably join the Euro punk invasion currently flooding the US with the likes of International Noise Conspiracy and The Hives.

ROSEMARY'S BILLYGOAT – *Evilution* (Porterhouse Records, Box 3597, Hollywood CA 90078) By the packaging of this CD as well as the bio enclosed, the comparison to GWAR are unavoidable. Dressed in ridiculous outfits, this L.A. based band deal out a mess of mid-tempo, sub-par metal with a live show that apparently focuses on performance over music. I mean, don't you have to question the integrity of any band that does a cover of Pat Benatar's "Hell Is For Children?" Even a completely crafted original song like "Nurse, Nurse" comes off more as a GWAR cast-off than anything else. Try Green Jelly instead.

THE SPONTANEOUS ASSASSINATION – "Write Off The World" b/w "Bay Lay" (Whorth Records, PO Box 119, South Sterling PA 18460) Excellent packaging on this debut 7-inch for this PA trio who haven't gotten over their Nirvana obsession quite yet. Quiet to loud, slow to fast, too many cliches on these two songs to give it a thumb's up.

STRYCHNINE – "Hate Finger" EP (TKO Records) Loud street punk from S.F. with high screamy vocals. Two originals here plus a cover of X's "We're Desperate." Maybe there's some ex-Filth members in this band, as that's what they kinda reminded me of.

THE TEEN TRAGEDIES – *For Those Of You Who Never Cared* (Punk Beat, Box 520052, Salt Lake City UT 84152) This is what would have been called "hardcore" back in the 80's – brash punk with screechy female vocals. Fourteen songs, packaged well...reminded me more of Naked Agression than anything else.

THEE S.T.P. – *Supersinner* (Devil Doll Records) The photos here made me misjudge this Italian band right off the bat as the band looks like a cross between early Weirdos (who were cool) and The Village People (who were not.) Instead of the goofiness I was expecting, I discovered high-octane, balls-out, punked-up greasy rock 'n' roll. Thee STP certainly owe a debt to the Dwarves but there are elements of the Supersuckers, old Detroit rock, and '77 punk as well. There's lot of music here, 28 tracks in all, some live but no filler. The last 13 tracks, which could have been a full-length of their own, were produced by Electric Frankenstein's Sal Canzonieri. Great packaging too.

THE WARREN COMMISSION – *Tricked By Cleverness* (Espo Records, PO Box 63, Allston MA 02134) Aggressive at times, the Warren Commission play a subdued, jangly brand of indie pop. The female vocals are smooth and superb, while the male voice on several songs is uneasy and unskilled. Thirteen songs in all, not bad for "easy listening."

WHIPPERSNAPPER – *Appearances Wear Thin* (Fueled By Ramen) Similar to Chicago's Horace Pinker, Whippersnapper play a particularly melancholy brand of dual guitar pop-punk. While the music here is competent and well produced (think Face To Face,) it's the vocals that impart a lovelorn feel. The personal lyrics don't hurt either. I found the whole thing somewhat bland, but any fans of the aforementioned bands will find something to like here.

COMPILATIONS

APOCALYPSE ALWAYS (Alternative Tentacles) There really is something for everyone on this label compilation, featuring 26 wildlyl diverse acts from Alt Tentacles. Those who like quiet, mopey stuff will want to check out Michael Gira or Jarboe's cuts (they're both ex-Swans), while The Fartz and Ratos De Porao will appease the hardcore metal enthusiast. Those with a penchant for the psychological may appreciate the truly odd cuts by mental defectives Half Japanese or Wesley Willis. My favorite cut here was the bluesy rock of a band called Black Kali Ma, and while the liner notes give you zero information on the bands, I can tell you that's the inimitable voice of the Dicks' Gary Floyd. There's a coupon with this CD so if you order another $30 worth of merch from Alternative Tentacles, you get the low price of this compilation completely refunded, which is a great deal.

HOPELESSLY DEVOTED TO YOU, Vol. 4 (Hopeless) Here's the fourth edition of this California label's sampler series, with a super-low price ($3.98 list!) and the unique and flashy packaging you often see with Hopeless releases. The label has taken quite a hit since Vol. 3, losing many of their better bands including the Nobodys, the Queers, and most regrettably, Dillinger Four. The stalward ska bands Mustard Plug and Against All Authority are still on the label, and each delivers one unreleased song here, as well as an album cut. Hopeless has given a home to vets Samiam as well as pickup up quirky Atom & His Package and the aptly named Weakerthans (ex-Propagandhi). The comp's most wince-inducing track is an unreleased nugget by Jeff Ott (of Fifteen fame). Whew, somebody light a match! Regardless, this is a tight package overall and if you dig any of the bands on Hopeless, this will be a must,with ten tracaks unavailable anywhere else and all for under four bucks.

HOW WE ROCK (Burning Heart/Epitaph) The only unreleased cut on here is from The Supersuckers, but as a fan of said act, that pleased me greatly. Generally, all the bands on this label sampler are punk associated but rock out, more or less in a 70's style. Many of them are Scandinavian (and very popular right now,) like the Hives, International Noise Conspiracy, and Gluecifer. The American acts are also mostly well-known bar-rock bands like New Bomb Turks, Rockey From The Crypt, and the Dwarves. Standouts here are the hilarious Turbo Negro cut about pizza and a cool song by Puffball. Any other rock critic would tell you that Puffball sound wayyyyy to much like Motorhead, and they'd be right; but fucking Motorhead rules and despite the effeminate name, so does Puffball. Nice package here too, slick booklet with band photos, and a nice silver on black print job to make the whole thing looks great.

MATT SKIBA & KEVIN SECONDS -- Split CD (Asian Man) What's the difference between these two artists? Well, in practical terms of today's punk scene, one of these guys is a has-been and the other (Matt Skiba of Alkaline Trio) is in the hottest punk band since Jawbreaker. What do these two artists have in common? Neither turned in their best material here.

PUNK- O-RAMA #7 (Epitaph) With its always excellent roster of bands, Epitaph is a recognized trademark of quality where bigtime punk is concerned. I actually look forward to this label's compilation series to see what their big boys have up their sleeves year after year, and to hope for a cool unreleased song or two from one of my faves. Punk-O-Rama #7 doesn't disappoint, with three new songs – one from the jokers in Guttermouth, a brutal cut from hardcore Death By Stereo, and an excellent outtake from Hot Water Music. Other bands here include Epitaph favorites like the Bouncing Souls, Pennywise, and of course Bad Religion, and newcomers like Division Of Laura Lee, 1208, and The Deviates.

The World According To Wawyrzniak

by joe wawyrzniak

A FISTFUL OF ROCK N ROLL Volume 9 (Devil Doll Records, P.O. Box 30727 Long Beach, CA 90853) This wonderfully raw, raucous, and raunchy 25-track compilation qualifies as the authentic gnarly article. We're talkin' rock stripped down to thrillingly tight, ragged, savagely wild and rippin' all spit and no polish bare essentials, the sort of gloriously ungodly noise that's deliciously bereft of any needless fancy-ass finesse or pretense. Instead what this honey offers is 25 fast 'n' funous caterwauling outbursts of unmitigated high-octane, righteously ceaseless and propulsive open up and holler at the top of your lungs rock 'n' roll abandon, all done in that unapologetically trashy, throbbing, blow-your-wad aggressive manner that will always get the nod from your friendly unreconstructed primitive caveman rock critic. As for the songs themselves, all of 'em smoke and none of 'em choke - meaning it would take up far too much space to list particular highlights found herein. And I think that says volumes about just how totally kick-ass this marvelously manic monolith truly is.

THE BENJAMIN CARTEL - *Salt Water* (Break-Up! Records, P.O. Box 15372 Columbw 432 15-0372) Here's a surefire effective recipe for a gracefully harmonic and utterly endearing album: An engaging dash of forlorn country, a stirring rush of quirkily catchy rock (dig those snazzy handclaps!), and a handy helping of crisply tuneful pop, gently shaken with a nicely humming buzz. Top off this delicious concoction with a commendably mature and breezily uplifting positive sensibility that's a total joy to hear and the net result is a bona fide winner. The vocals are clear and affecting, the arrangements frothy and melodic, the playing brisk and precise, the overall sound sumptuously sweet, bubbly, and delicate. What's not to like?

THE BLISSTONES (www.theblisstones.com) If you dig divinely kicked-back no-nonsense rock'n'roll music that's done with plenty of tunefully rich 'n' tasty grit and soul, then this supremely sonorous 6-song serving of grittily on-th- money earthy rumbling is just the EP for you, buddy. I got no complaints about Laura Fay Lewis' redoubtably deep, brassy, and cutting voice, a stunningly fierce and crystalline vocal dynamo that goes straight to the heart witl remarkable directness. The softly biting guitars, seething subdued basslines, and remorseless, clip-clop trudging drum beats masterfully create and sustain an atmospherically rueful tone that's made all the more powerful by the stirringly gradual tempos and divinely simmering rhythmic chug 'n' bop undertow. From the lowdown funky slithering groove of "That Kim Reaction" to the patient yearning of the extremely affecting "Calm B4 the Storm" to the neatly thudding slow drag of "Highway 17," this sweetly bluesy, somewhat countryish and always melodic outing never once hits a remotely false or off-key note.

BLOW UP DAISY (blowupdaisy~aol.com) A seriously bang-up 5-song EP CD chockfull of the kind of tough, sinewy, hard-kickin' rough'n'tumble rock'n'roll bossness that yours truly never tires of. The sublimely snarly 'n' snotty nasality of the lead vocals certainly hits the spot. Ditto the forcefully funky, punky, lowdown junky arrangements; fiercely grinding wah-wah-laced buzzsaw guitars; punchy sock-it-to-you gutbucket drums; and searing basslines that are nothing but pure strangulated spew. Marvelously bereft of even any residual traces of polish or pretense (always a good thing in my little rock critic book), this right-on honey instead offers at least a week's worth of gritty, ragged, delectably basic and no-frills straight-up rompin' rickety noise for the listener to groove on. Let's hope a full length's in the works; the world would be a much better place with this type of divinely unholy racket gloriously upsetting the numbing banality of the current mainstream rock scene.

THE UNKNOWN – "The Real Thing" EP (PO Box 110361 Cleveland, OH 44111) A perfectly crunchy 'n' punchy full-bore 5-song CD EP pop-rock eruption. This beat-stompin', guitar-shreddin', swift tempo'd team tear ass down the let-it-all-hang-out aural highway at an excitingly accelerated velocity. Everything about this honey simply clicks: the irresistibly boyish charm of the joyous vocals, the stirringly loose, woolly arrangements, the undeniably galvanizing zeal and gusto of the tirelessly frenetic playing, and especially the overall wondrous sense of absolute glee & bliss which radiates through every last bright, invigorating, dynamically kickin' note. All this -- and lotsa laudably topical, intelligent and provocative lyrics, too.

FIRST NIGHT ON EARTH - "No One Knows Anything for Sure" (Liquilab Records PO 12321 Charlotte, NC 28220) Delicately crafting a steady series of languidly enticing, ambient and ethereal soundscapes which radiantly shimmer with an irresistibly insouciant ease and exquisitely graceful melodicism, this winningly quirky experimental pop-rock outfit produce a supremely spacey and refreshingly unique little beauty with this strikingly crisp and hypnotic album. Creating and maintaining a lush, lulling, amazingly dense and heady trance-like atmosphere is the name of the sublimely off-beat game here: gorgeously fluid guitars, seamless basslines, divinely zoned-to-the-sparkling-bone keyboards, and gently propulsive drums carefully swirl and undulate to a seductively laid-back rhythmic momentum that pulls the listener in on the basis of its very sweetly trippy and relaxed mellowness alone. Sure, Wes Grasty's engaging vocals and the touchingly tender and thoughtful sensibility add immensely to the album's considerable warmth and appeal, but ultimately it's the sumptuously serene sonority of that deliciously dreamy sound which makes this baby such a total treat.

OXFORD COLLAPSE (thecollapse@hotmail.com) For those picky arbiters of music that is delicately melodic and intricately constructed, this totally manic and fiercely off-the-cuff scrappy ragbag of funk, punk, house, and pop-rock won't be to your liking. However, if you got almost no taste whatsoever and think raucously unholy racket done by a trio of furiously cranked-up Brooklyn noisemakers with absolutely no grasp of pretense and a gloriously frenzied ability to just get down and jam in a thrillingly right 'n' tight manner represents rock'n'roll at its most excitingly pure and basic (i.e., if you're just like little ol' Jersey Joe the pathetically undiscriminating rock critic), then this explosive aural eruption will do the trick quite nicely. I mean, how can one possibly find fault with those wildly wonky 'n' springy guitar riffs, rickety drums, awesomely hummin' in the superbly soulful sonic Twilight Zone keyboards, and marvelously poppin' fat-ass throbbing basslines, all frantically churning and burning away to a deeply chillin' tear-straight-into-your-psyche groove?

14A - Karma (819 Kennedy Blvd. Bayonne, NJ 07002) This premiere album offers 10 potently moody, shuddery, emotionally raw and stirring tracks built on a strong, harmonic, soulful expressive aural bedrock of urgent, propulsive, tunefully tight melodicism. The quivery, tautly controlled vocals project angst and despair with striking directness. The fiercely wound arrangements keep on a sturdy, streamlined, forcefully pushin' forward path of starkly efficient musicianship throughout. The songs themselves are movingly effective in their unflinchingly frank openness and resignation, conveying a sense of frail heartbreak equally fragile hope with genuinely poignant results. Favorite cut: the hilariously caustic & profane "Fall of Rome," a splendidly snarky critique of the grossly commercialized main rock scene.

BOX OF STUFF - It 's Not Hollywood (scmplyr@adelphia.net) This solid, funky, in-the-groove L.A. pop-rock outfit traffic in what I call handy-dandy mix'n'match rock'n'roll music genre combo blending. The frothy "True Love Survives" casually slogs along to a soothingly relaxed bumpin' reggae/calypso tempo, the blustery "Walk in Addiction" and boss "Sanctuary" swagger mightily to a rugged hard-rock stomp, "Blue Autumn" milks a harmonic approach for maximum tunefulness, "Finally Hit the Top" goes the potently anthemic route with dead-on precision, and the lovely ballad "Every Drop of Life" ends it all on a sweetly serene closing note. Holding this inspired and inventive potpourri of disparate elements together are the supremely hoarse and sinewy lead vocals, the gorgeously heaving backing vocal harmonies, lotsa tasty, gritty, relentlessly grinding guitar riffs, steamrolller drums, and a powerfully gutsy grasp of rough 'n' tumble aural punch and melody that's a joy to hear. A seriously kick-ass album.

KNOTWORKING - Notes Left Out (www.knotworking.net) Hailing from Albany, NY, with an ever-changing line-up, superbly fronted by arrestingly haunted hag-ridden singer/songwriter Edward Gorch (who works as a garbageman to both pay the bills and glean a wealth of everyday real-life material to incorporate into his art), modestly recorded in an attic, and even done using some discarded gear Gorch unearthed in the trash (!), this delicately harmonious and fabulously unadorned lo-fi folk-pop gem coasts by on a quietly affecting, soothing sonic bed of plain-spoken introspection. Gorch's slight, yet distinctive voice, a thin, piercing, tremulously nasal tenor, quivers with heart-melting vulnerability. Moreover, Gorch's earnest, down-to-earth, put-it-to-you-straight sensibility cuts to the meat of the matter with stunning directness and a winning paucity of pretense. Most importantly, the songs themselves poignantly explore such commonplace working class issues as love, faith, money, and the struggle of just getting by with admirable taste, acuity and subtlety.

JOHN TAGLIERI - Leap of Faith (Leap Dog Music, P.O. Box 7663 East Rutherford, NJ Occasionally I have the rare pleasure to hear an album that from the first jaunty, rousing, tunefully hoppin' opening bar bowls me completely over. Well, this highly touted debut from remarkably talented and promising pop-rock multi-instrumentalist singer/songwriter Joh

Taglieri sure makes the grade as such an exceptional work. Divinely upbeat track by track and soulfully sparkling note for note, one exquisitely clear-eyed lyrical couplet after another, Taglieri's hearty, raspy, wonderfully full-bodied voice takes a firm hold on your feelings as it soars straight for the heavens. The catchy, lulling, carefully chiming and sometimes kickin' arrangements really hit the right-on sonic spot: pretty ringing guitars, delicate synthesizer fills, softly assertive drums, and nicely understated basslines all blend together into a melodically rid harmonic, and most irresistibly golden honey sweet sound.

THE CRAYONS - What Color Are You? (Cropduster Records 251 Clinton Avenue New NY 10002) Here's the perfect mid-summer night's album: A softly lulling, cool and easy, yet still smoothly undulating waft of delicately melodic indie-pop breeziness suffused with a winning surplus of bittersweet reflectivity that's genuinely touching in its deeply felt longing. The clear, commanding vocals float over a soothing sonic bed of slightly stinging guitars, buzzing basslines, and nicely subdued drums. The thoughtful lyrics and crisp, carefully w harmonic arrangements likewise hit the nicely affecting spot with exquisite tunefulness a:
fragility. And the album's steady, but kicked-back, just chuggin' along rhythmic momentum sucks you into its calmly boppin' undertow in an oh-so-tasty subtle and unforced manner.

AUTOMATIC SLIM - Daisy Cutter (2212 Frederick Douglass Blvd., Apt. 5C New York, 10026) For those discriminating folks who like their rock music ripe to bursting with lots and body, who got a special taste for a deep, very rich and bluesy sound that lazily chugs at a gradual tempo, then this thick sonic slab of pure aural heaviness is certainly the for you. For starters, you can groove your hard-rockin' heart out on those gracefully fluid melodic guitar riffs which burble forth with a tasty constant succession of deliciously meaty, throbbing hooks. The strong, sinewy drum beats are likewise really sweet, too. You won't hear any complaints from your humble rock critic about the smooth, seamless basslines, either. Gelu Sulugiac's throatily expressive rumble-grumble voice sure hits the spot as well. The fact that every last laid-back song here comes across as relaxed, unhurried, and best of all, totally unaffected qualifies as a substantial plus. The nice thoughtful lyrics round off this completely on the money winner.

CLANG BANG (800 Pennington St., Elizabeth, NJ 07202) The lively, invigorating opening song, "Firecracker," with its infectiously exuberant vocals, gutsy tribal drums, and perfectly punchy 'n' poppin' groovy-ass guitar riffs, starts things off with a crackling bang. The subsequent tracks are just as stirring and dynamic, further spicing up the tasty sonic brew with thoughtful, witty lyrics, provocative subject matter ("Clang Bang" addresses the mindlessly rampant patriotic fervor currently running horribly amuck in our country with bracing acuity), zoned-to-the-bone keyboards, gorgeously dense and complex jammin' arrangements, row stop'n'go hoppin' tempos, a healthy disdain for the repressive status quo, and enough bustling, shoot-for-the-stars vitality to light up all of New Jersey for at least a week. I listened to this album after a gruelingly hard and endless day at work and it sure as shit elevated my previously sagging spirits considerably, coming across as a welcome and refreshing n a time when I really needed it. Accolades don't come any finer than that.

CALLIOPE - Braille (Thick Records) The lovely opening song" Girl," with its endearingly husky vocals, gently strummed acoustic guitar, and crisp hand effortlessly exudes a fragile, lulling, folksy charm that the rest of this irresistibly sweet & spacey psychedelic ambient pop album expands upon with uniformly beguiling results. The tempos slog along at a soothingly gradual clip. The lush, dreamy, rather druggy and densely layered melodies softly swirl about in a languorously hazy sonic bed of coolly undulating rhythm. The basic tone remains nicely pleasant and upbeat throughout. The carefully wrought and expansive arrangements are exquisitely filled out with tasty understated horns, divine delicate guitars, wonky synthesizer effects, and superbly subdued drums. Serenely harmonic and relaxing, this wonderfully low-key winner casts a breezy, lazy, utterly enchanting spell that's well worth falling under.

Pacer

JUCIFER - I Name You Destroyer (Velocetta Records, 83 Walton St. Atlanta, GA 30303) Dark, despairing, and oftentimes so unremittingly grim that it's borderline unbearable, this remarkably hellish and disturbing album possesses all the grotesque allure of a particularly horrible automobile accident. Just like that aforementioned accident this album is anything but pretty and comforting, yet it's freakishly compelling and haunting just the same. The fact that musically it's hard to categorize only adds to its aberrant appeal. The arrangements are thick and moody, with churning, gritty guitars and clanging drums creating a brooding atmosphere dripping with dread and anguish. The heavy, plodding, trudging beats and creepy-crawling tempos maintain an arrestingly off-kilter discordant groove throughout. Amber Valentine's striking vocals further enhance the all-out strangeness: so purring and seductive one moment; raw, angry and snarling the next, Amber's beautifully voice cuts right to the marrow with hair-raising directness. The unsparingly downbeat subject matter clinches the whole deal: Beginning with a supremely unnerving song about freezing to death, the subsequent tracks address such similarly depressing topics as apathy, drug addiction, loneliness, and sexual promiscuity in frightfully straightforward terms. All in all, this one sizes up as a singularly stunning, albeit profoundly discomfiting oddball landmark.

PACER - Big Buildings, Small Stars (Eskimo Kiss Records, PO Box 3603 Wilmington, NC 28406) As any avid reader of this particular column (all five or six of you in total, I'm sure) should know by now, I've got this deep-seated fondness for music which keeps things spare, elementary, and uncluttered, music which eschews needless (and often soulless) razzle-dazzle techo-trickery in favor of a much more basic, lo-fi, no-frills minimalist style. Well, this fabulously austere and unadorned album certainly scores high marks from yours truly for charmingly lean 'n' tight melodic simplicity alone. Sure, the gorgeously crystalline harmonies and poignant emotional urgency of the vocals by Jeremy Matthews and Kim Ware-Matthews qualifies as an added bonus. The taut, stripped-down, nothing terribly fancy or elaborate arrangements, little more than judiciously applied guitars and drums with some nice handclaps and snazzy keyboards occasionally tossed in for good measure, likewise hit the gracefully dulcet spot. The thoughtful lyrics cut right to the heart with quietly effective straightforwardness. But ultimately it's the fact that there's no bombastic filler or a single wasted note to be found point in this beautifully stark and direct album which really brings this baby over as a sweet and subtle little jewel.

ROMAN EVENING - Together Now (Bitter Stag Records, P.O. Box 190008 San Francisc 94119) This is the kind of supremely gloomy and melancholy album that cuts deep and lingers long in the memory, hanging heavily in the air like a dark, oppressively gray and bleak rain cloud. Adam Klein's hoarse, affectingly nasal and quivery tenor expresses regret and heartbreak with touching clarity. The lovely, marvelously drawn-out, delicately harmonious and immaculately crafted arrangements adopt a properly spartan and thus quietly powerful ap~ the stately keyboards, cutting guitars, low-key drums, piercing trumpet, and soft pedal steel carefully blend together to create a downcast atmosphere that's almost tangible in its brooding sadness. Klein and his musical collaborator Michael Mullen spent over two years producing this extremely moving and reflective pop-rock stunner; the net result of all that admirable hard work and commitment is an astonishing album of uncommonly fine depth, subtlety, and poignancy.

THE SUBSTANCE (www.thesubstance.net) A perfectly crunchy'n'punchy 8 song pop-rock CD consisting of one track after another of pure sinewy, rough-groovin', really dynamic right in your face blunt aural assertiveness. The vocals are clear and keenly emotive, the smart and thoughtful, the arrangements clean, tight, and direct, the sporadic electronic enhancements are kept to a tolerable minimum, the playing strong and steady throughout funky wah-wah guitars, smooth bass, and sturdy drums whip things up with considerable pizzazz, while the complex, winding, forcefully bumpin' melodies swell and surge to a thick, heavy under-the-fingernails dirty sound with constantly on the money snap and tunefulness.

CROSSTOPS - Cloverleaf Fandango (Tinnitus Records, 250 Napoleon Street Ste. K San Francisco, CA 94116) Hey, good buddy? What's your copy? Well, this here is Jammin' Jersey Joe the Rock Critic. Whatcha got for me, Jammin' Jersey Joe? Well, I got one helluva an album for you, partner. It's this shithot smokin' crazier-than-a-rabid coondog platter of kick-ass raunchy'n'raucous trucker's country punk music! Say that again, Jammin' Jersey Joe? Did you say trucker's country punk music? Yeah, I sure did. And boy does it ever cook on primo unleaded Diesel fuel. We've got revved-up four-to-the-floor tempos, manic growlin' vocals, fiercely twangin' guitars, incessant bulldozing drums, hard-stompin' beats, and more wall-to-wall , go-for-broke gear-grindin' lunacy than you can shake an oily dipstick at. First-rate mondo wacko subject matter, too. There's songs about UFOs, boobs, beaver, broads, beer, lesbians, good-lookin' asses — y'know, all that way bitchin' lowdown sleazy that makes life worth living.

THE MEANS - Vil/ Viol (Doubleplusgood, P.O. Box 3608 Minneapolis, MN 55403) A dozen positively brutal and delectably basic tracks worth of thundering dredged-up-from-the-fill trashbucket garage rock racket, done all crude and sloppy with no fancy frills or needless get in the way of the raw, frenetic, just barely in tune caterwauling bedlam. The snotty snarling vocals go straight for the throat with jolting ferocity. The raggedy-ass primitive arrangements are the authentic gnarly article: Grinding hacksaw guitars that roar and rumble up a searing storm, explosively aggressive erupting-all-over-the-kit drums, and seething basslines that supply undertow to the kick-you-in-the-balls savage aural frenzy. Slick, smooth, and polished this scrappy, hellishly loud and abrasive distorted shrieking noise sure ain't, but what this twiisted ear-bending beaut lacks in pretty melodicism (plenty, to be honest) it more than makes up in arrestingly ugly and anguished sonic dementia.

POP FOR CHARITY - Sound Progression (Doubleplusgood, P.O. Box 3608 Minneapolis MN 55403) This 20 song various artists compilation initially spits, sneers and crackles to marvelously rough 'n' ragged garage-punk beat before settling down into more mellow an melodic detours into emo, hip-hop, folk, and electronica. The musical eclecticism on display makes for a most enjoyably rich and varied album chock full of more than enough good keep it on a nicely tuneful track throughout. Among the highlights are Dillinger Four's fabulously grungy cover of Motorhead's "No Voices in the Sky," the Dames' thunderously threatening "Hey Paramedic!," the Beautiful Mothers' splendidly swaggering "The Last Ones (Yet)," the deliciously gradual rhythmic pull of Komodo's movingly doleful "Take Me Too" and Buck 65's supremely sexy "Pants on Fire." In short, there's plenty to savor in this sweetly diverse treat.

KILOWATTHOURS - The Bright Side (356 South 1st Street #24 Brooklyn, NY 11211) This is the kind of slow, careful, and achingly deliberate aural excursion into sheer down-in-the-forlorn moping that quietly sneaks up on you and bowls you over with its deceptively spare, laid-back, no-frills approach. Sung and played with a jolting restraint which paradoxically enough is made all the more stirring for never once breaking out into full steam ahead rockin' mode, the nine songs found on this album convey regret, heartbreak and a general feeling of complete angst so thoroughly that things become a bit too heavy-going at times. Still, the moaning, barely audible vocals, gradually trudging tempos, tight, moody, arrangements, the alarmingly precise drums, and cutting, yet subdued guitars all combine together to create a powerfully brooding and melancholy atmosphere that's hauntingly sad and ultimately quite touching.

THE KUSTARD KINGS - Blam! (Confidential Recordings PO Box 791 Peter Stuyvesant New York, NY 10009) A shit-hot smokin' nugget that serves up 11 songs worth of immensely hip 'n' happenin' instrumental bossness. The songs themselves range from rockabilly to surf plus a little lounge and funk to keep things constantly chillin' and nicely varied throughout. The twangy guitars and rock-solid jack hammer drums lead the all-out aural assault, while a divinely zoned to the gnarly bone Farfisa organ bleats away in the background. Concluding the freaky fun are two spot-on covers: Our boys get down and funky with a seriously hard-diggin' version of "Jungle Boogie" and go somethin' hysterical with a revved-up rendition of "Spiderman." Net verdict: This baby's a hugely enjoyable treat.

MOTORWAY TO ROSWELL - Waiting for Fireworks (RevUp Records, 115 Broadholli Suite 225 Melville, NY 11747) This finely affecting and contemplative pop-rock album mines a touchingly sincere and straightforward line in bittersweet regret and melancholy. The singing is splendidly clear and direct. The arrangements are clean, tightly harmonic and uncluttered. Every last punchy, ringing, melodic note counts and there's no extraneous filler to speak of. The whole thing crunches along at a steadily propulsive mid-tempo clip. But what really makes this album so special and praiseworthy is the admirably grown-up and reflective sensibility that permeates every last song. These guys are not a bunch of disgustingly callow youths pining for the irresponsibility of their waning adolescence; instead, they're smart and introspective young adults who face the trials and tribulations of encroaching adulthood with commendable strength, courage, maturity and intelligence. And that refreshing fact alone qualifies this album as a complete winner

STARS OF STAGE AND SCREEN - Dying to Meet You (www.starsnyc.net) Right from the first pretty, delicate, carefully wrought and gracefully harmonic note this album seduces you with the sheer alluring fullness of its sound. And what a succulently supple sound it is: Vast and expansive, sonorous and symphonic, with lovely lulling strings, gently cutting guitars, sof percussive drums, and beautifully fluid basslines swirling to a lush, relaxing, languidly fic rhythm. No complaints about the vocals, either: Daughtry Carstarphen's soft, soothing voice casts an irresistible angelic spell while Timothy Roven's mellow singing likewise really hits the spot. "Full On" in particular has a definite hypnotic buzz to it, "Julie Loves Toys" pulsates to a buoyant electronic beat, the neatly bumpin' instrumental "Electro" cu tasty mile-wide groove, and the slow, meditative cover of "Born to Be Wild" is marvelously offbeat. Very nice.

ICE WAGON FLU – "Too Much Time" EP (www.icewagonflu.com) I'm sure lotsa folks who read this column always wonder just what it takes for a band to impress me. Well, let's use this fine 2 song country music EP as an example of the sort of thing that'li always win me over. For starters, keep the arrangements spare, tuneful, and simple, with no excess padding, but a dash of tasty banjo and groovin Hammond organ to keep the gently harmonic sound nicely hummin' throughout. Have the vocals alternate between a moving nasal twang and a livelier, more exuberant yahoo holler. Make the tempos either flow gracefully in a slow, stately fashion or barrel ahead with a certain breakneck momentum. Plain-spoken lyrics are sure to please me. Ditto a touchingly fork regretful sensibility. However, what truly gets an A+ mark from your humble music critic is serving up two songs of a radically different nature on the same EP, therefore offering a succulent study in contrasts that I'm a total sucker for. Okay, that's basically all it really takes to impress I'm sure you loyal five or six are glad I finally let the cat out of the bag.

Motorway To Roswell

BIGGER LOVERS - Honey in the Hive (Yep Roc Records, PO Box 4821 Chapel Hill NC 27515) As a devout aficionado of terrifically terse, tight, and totally to the point kickin' pop-rock , I naturally dug this sophomore effort from a tip-top Philadelphia band a whole lot. How can one go wrong with those divinely soaring vocals, crunchy ringing guitars, strong understated drum beats, persistent basslines hovering in the air like a nest of harmonic hornets, gracefully tuneful and engaging sound, bittersweet lyrics, and superbly polished, finely honed to the sublimely chiming hilt arrangements, all crackling with an irresistibly taut & vibrant melodicism that cuts right to the chase with stirring directness and a wholly refreshing dearth of pretense? Of course, the answer is you just can't go remotely wrong with this wonderful album, so snag yourself a copy as soon as you can.

HEADLANDS BAND - California (www.headlandsband.com) Bands that boldly defy easy categorization by going whole hog with a crazily diverse and unpredictable sound are a tremendous rarity in this exceedingly bland decade, so these oddball San Francisco tunes score bonus points from me for their audacity alone. The opening song "California" masterfully sets the tone for the startling sonic adventurousness to come: It begins with a beautiful wash of melodious organ ripples, with a slow, casual tempo and a melancholy air, then revs up an out halfway through, and concludes with a lot of astonishing dissonant rumbling. "Postcard from New Orleans" offers a touching serving of low-key forlorn introspection, the jubilant "Lonely Miser" rides a hoppin' groove to exquisitely kickin' glory, and "Walking Home Early" ends things in a properly resigned, yet still rousing manner. Frequently these guys go in for a terrifically lively and countryish harmoniousness, other times they rock it up somethin' dynamic, and at no point do they play it remotely safe. A marvelously off-center and unconventional album.

The Quiet Corner

by al crisafulli

Record labels are such a nightmare. Everything has to be cut-and-dry with a record label. Black and white. See, the basic idea for a record label is to find an artist that fits a mold; some mold, any mold that can be packaged and mass-marketed to the general public. Then, sign that artist to a mindfuck of an ultra-restrictive contract and set the marketing people to work.

The marketing people take whatever is left of the artist's personality and try to distill it into a one or two-page biography, filled with talking points and highlights. They consolidate an artist into a sales pitch, an "elevator speech" that can be delivered in a thirty-second phone call to an independent record promoter, a DJ, a magazine writer, a program director.

And if the square peg developed by the marketing people doesn't fit just right in the round hole desired by the media, then the artist languishes in obscurity until being unceremoniously dropped from their ballsqueezer contract, and only the occasional artist recovers.

Why any musical artist in this day and age would actually **want** to sign a contract with **any** record label beyond the most independent and artist-oriented labels out there is beyond me. But they do.

Anyway, I'm sifting through the pile of efficiently distilled talking points that come with the CDs Jim sends, courtesy of the record labels, and I've decided to throw 'em all in the trash. I've got a stack of CDs, and I don't give a shit who's on 'em, which journalists like the band, what chart position their last CD had in CMJ, or what radio stations have added them. I'm going to just review the music.

Which, by the way, is a pleasant experience – at least on the ERIKA SIMONIAN CD **29 ½** (Erika didn't anticipate I would throw her bio in the shitheap, so she didn't put her address on the CD, which is a big no-no, but check out www.erikasimonian.com if you don't care). There's a lot of Liz Phair in Simonian's breathy, deep-voiced delivery, but the songs stop short of being derivative. Clean electric guitars and simple melodies flesh out most of the songs – some of which take a while to develop. Reminds me a lot of Salem 66. Am I an old man if I refer to Salem 66 in a review? "I Got A Song", by the way, is classic – Simonian, backed by a simple acoustic guitar, sings "I've got a song in me/That I've been aching to sing/It's called fuck you/It goes fuck you/So fuck you/fuck you/fuck you/oh, no, fuck you". Now that's what I'm talking about.

My Jeezus, September 11 was an awful, horrible mess. JOHN SULLIVAN wrote an album about it called **New York Songs of Sept. 11th** (buy it at www.cdpimp.com – again, no address). It's not very good – Sullivan can't sing, and the songs are very repetitive and monotonous and redundant and they just say the same thing over and over and over again. But in the liner notes, Sullivan explains why he put out an album, and I can just totally identify with a feeling that 11 months of distance had managed to block out of my mind – the utter helplessness, fear, horror, sorrow, and desire to document and change and never forget and have closure, all at the same time. John, I hope you're coping okay. I hug my family a little extra tight, every night, and that's not such a bad habit to get into.

ELAINE SUMMERS name-drops on her CD **Sparkler** (ESP, PO Box 32, Vashon, WA 98070). Produced by Pete Droge! Thanks to Stone Gossard! RED Distribution! Cameron Crowe! Nancy & Ann Wilson! Wahoo! The packaging is really colorful and pinkish and fluorescent, and the CD itself – in contrast – is sparse and jet black. It has one of those clear trays, and more crazy, colorful artwork behind the CD. Wow! How colorful! How many famous people! What an unbelievably impressive-looking CD!

Meanwhile, back in the world of music, THE TIMBRE PROJECT have made a perfectly good CD, **Ruining Perfectly Good Songs**, full of minor-key pop songs with a hint of odd humor and just a tinge of offbeat arrangements and instrumentation. In a weird sort of way, they recall the Counting Crows (and I mean that in the best of possible ways) – great songs, most of which build to an emotional crescendo with just enough power pop to make me feel good. Excellent, **really** excellent arrangements – lots of tasteful use of instruments that are unconventional in a pop sense (acoustic guitars, lots of percussion instruments, pedal steel, organ, violin). "A Case Against Cloning" is a magnificent song in a "Bittersweet Symphony" sort of way, a great love song. Good stuff, I'm looking forward to hearing more (Ice Cream Headache, PO Box 426006, Cambridge, MA 02142).

There's really no description for the kind of music ERIC FOX plays. I guess you could call some of the songs "ambient", because they're repetitive, slow, melodic soundscapes. But there's entirely too much guitar to call it "ambient". Lots of texture, very mellow. An excellent collection of moody, ethereal instrumental music. The name of the CD is **Roman A Clef** (buy this – Dunket Records, 493 Clinton St., Brooklyn, NY 11231)

MILO is an absolutely godawful, novelty act wannabe with unfunny songs and poor songwriting, recorded poorly and played with the absolute minimum of musical proficiency. It actually hurts my brain to listen to this, and it bugs me how much he's trying to sound like They Might Be Giants (go to gloomytunes.com if you're so motivated).

Tori Amos wannabes come in so many flavors. Some of them play piano, some of them play guitar, some of them have backup bands. All of them annoy me, because the artist somehow feels that a serious lack of originality can be replaced with a breathy, croaky, sultry female voice. The perpetrator this time is MARY ANN FARLEY and the CD is **My Life Of Crime.** Indeed. (www.maryannfarley.com)

Really great folk music can be so powerful and beautiful and captivating. DAVID MASSENGILL's **My Home Must Be a Special Place** (Gadfly, a great label, PO Box 5231, Burlington, VT, 05402) is a collection of personal stories and images and country-western flavor. Quiet guitar and whisper-smooth vocals singing lyrics you want to read. And with song titles like "The Great Holston Mountain Rescue of 1954" and "Frank Goodpasture Had a Pony", what's not to like? I haven't heard an acoustic record this pleasant, with stories this engrossing, since Kate Jacobs' *Hydrangea*. This is that same type of record, and I'd love to spend an evening at a cozy club, listening to Massengill sing.

As a kid, I had a Radio Shack pillow speaker that I connected to an AM radio on which I would listen to 1970s radio hits as I drifted to sleep. This is where I developed my affinity for power pop, and why JAY BENNETT & EDWARD BURCH's **The Palace at 4am (Part I)** is such an appealing record to me. Driving rhythms, fuzzy overdubbed electric guitar licks, complex chord structures, and crystal clear vocals singing memorable melodies. There are hooks all *over* this CD, and I am a SUCKER for a killer hook. This has all the hallmarks of a great power pop album – twelve-string electric guitar, fat harmony vocals in the chorus, snap-snap-snap snare hits, even a nod or two to the rockabilly roots of the early rock 'n roll from which much power pop derives its influences (www.undertowmusic.com).

Not quite indie rock, not quite pop, not quite emo, not quite Tortoise-inspired melodic noise, MAYDAY is more on their CD **old blood** (Saddle Creek, PO Box 8554, Omaha, NE 68108). Quiet music with dissonant passages, soft female backing vocals, guitar noise aside background organ and what sounds like a pedal steel, Mayday bring the bacon home, for the most part. A vaguely emo singer (remember, I tossed the bios in the trash, so I don't know his name) with a throaty whine misses notes and sings without expression, which is frustrating, since the music is so expressive. It all starts to tail off later in the CD, though, which is a bummer. The songs get, well, boring and slow to develop.

If SCOTT LIPPINCOTT threw away his Beatles records, he'd probably write brilliant songs. On his self-titled CD he writes Beatles songs, even ripping off the "Love Me Do" harmonica in the intro to "Everything Runs Together" (www.scottlippincott.com).

The Late Album by DAVID POE is a well-produced, semi-rocking, semi-acoustic record in the Duncan Sheik or Shaun Mullins. Not bad (Epic Records, a major label, buy it at Wal-Mart).

WOWIE ZOWIE

meditations on psychedelicized pop music by howie kutner

The Alphabet - *When the Sun Calls Your Name or, Ghost World* (www.alphabetband.com) These nine tunes are a decent batch of 60's paisley pop and Velvets guitar fuzz. Nothing mind-blowing here but if you dig VU and early Jesus and Mary Chain you're bound to find this enjoyable.

Apples In Stereo - *Velocity of Sound* (spinartrecords.com) Whether it was a calculated move or not, the cutesy indie psych poppers have gone back to basics and abandoned their trippy *Sgt. Pepper/Pet Sounds* approach to writing pop tunes for more of a stripped down, fuzzed-out 60's garage pop/rock approach that is not that far removed to what The Hives and The White Stripes are doing. Sure, there are some catchy little numbers here but after a while they just start to all sound the same.

Andrew W.K. - *I Get Wet* (Island) Don't let Mr. W.K.'s dumb dirt-bag metal head shtick fool ya. He's a lot smarter than his overzealous party crusader image lets on. Here's a guy who has the brains to mix the cheesiest Casio synth pop this side of a John Hughes movie with 80's metal, sing-along oi choruses ala Rocket from the Crypt, and futuristic power pop. And since the party has been missing from rock n roll for a while and now that all this post -grunge vinyl pants wearing corporate emo crap is ruling the airwaves who better to crash their lame party than some greasy long haired with dirty jeans. Ok, so he's not Cliff Burton; he's a little calculated but he writes super fun rock anthems that make you wanna cut loose and go ape shit.

Arlo - *Stab The Unstoppable Hero* (sunpop.com) Arlo is a band that was able to inject some life back into the stagnant state of indie rock on their last record *Up High In The Night* and they manage to do it once again with *Stab The Unstoppable Hero*. In fact, this time around, Arlo is more confident, which shines through on each track with their great harmonies and instantly catchy hooks. Their anglophile influence crossed with their love of classic American indie rock ala Pixies/Superchunk translates into a sound all their own.

Aquanote - *The Pearl* (astralwerks.com) *The Pearl* is the first release from Aquanote, the solo project of San Francisco studio wiz Gabriel Rene. Its as good as ambient jazz-house gets sucking you into its warm and sensual dimension of sound with one of the best productions I've ever heard. Various musicians and handful of different female vocalists accompany Rene. The Pearl breaks out of the usual clichés of the jazz-house genre which has a lot to with the fact that Rene is a great songwriter giving each well crafted track it's own feel whether it's the upbeat disco vibe of "Nowhere" or the celestial R&B of "Come Around". The fifteen tracks contained on The Pearl deliver untouchable grooves and arrangements that elevates from the rest of the jazz-house herd.

Bad Wizard - *Sophisticated Mouth* (teepeerecords.com) Well I guess the cat's finally out of the bag on NYC's best rock n roll band now garnering press in everything from The New Yorker to Rolling Stone. A band that finally deserves all the accolades with their 'free your mind... and your ass will follow' brand of southern boogie thunder, Detroit rock soul, and Angus Young riffs. Sophisticated Mouth is the album I was hoping these guys would make. Its got all the energy and charisma of Free & Easy but with better songwriting that demonstrates that slowing down the tempo a bit doesn't mean compromising power.

Basement Jaxx - *Rooty.* (astralwerks.com) England's electro mind fuck duo is back with Rooty the their second full length release which they continue to disregard the conventional structures and influences of everyday electronica with an almost cut and paste punk approach. In doing so the Jaxx inspire and floor the senses with killer beats, samples, and hooks that suck you and keep you captive for the duration of the disc.

Beachwood Sparks – "Make The Robot Cowboys Cry" EP (SubPop) The Spark's latest is a song 6 EP of their earnest soulful twang, ideal for those quiet summer nights sitting on the front porch staring up at the stars. The band once again shows growth as songwriters on the delicate wide-eyed pop of "Ponce de Leon Blues" and "Sing Your Thoughts," both tracks worth the price of the disc alone with enough warmth to melt the most jaded heart. And the sixth track, "Ghost Dance 14 92," is a great bouncy nugget of sunshine to send you on yer way.

The Black Keys - *The Big Come Up* (alive-totalenergy.com) *The Big Come Up* is my first introduction into the world of one of the more convincing white boy indie delta blues infused groups I've heard. This Akron, Ohio duo's sound resonates heart, grit, soul, and the right amount of rock n roll fuzz lying underneath their basement blues rock brew. Vocalist Dan Auerbach has a voice to kill for, a kind of voice that hasn't been heard from a white dude since a young Eric Burdon came onto England's blues-rock scene back in the mid 60's. The guitar sound and playing is just as tasteful as the vocals and drummer Patrick Carney keeps the perfect beat through each tune. The thirteen tunes on The Big Come Up capture the raw soul of delta blues and freewheeling' spirit of Hendrix and early Zeppelin. At last an indie band deserving of any hype they may get for the simple reason that these boys have talent.

Black Nasa (teepeerecords.com) Black Nasa is the brainchild of Chris Kosnik ex Atomic Bitchwax bassist. The 8 cuts on this here disc mix the space rock of Hawkwind and Pink Floyd with the southern rock soul and slide guitar of the Allman Brothers. Talk about breaking the mold.

Bis - *Plastique Nouveau* (spinartrecords.com) This once cutesy electro lunch pail pop threesome (two dudes and a chick) from Scotland have ditched their Romper Room antics in place of a more adult 80's new wave dance pop style with

Butthole Surfers (Photo by Shawn Scallen)

modern electronica influences, but still keep the indie attitude intact. Imagine the bounciness of Kraftwerk meets the early new wave of Depeche Mode and Berlin. New wave fans will eat this up as well as fans of new dance floor sensations Peaches and Fisherspooner.

Curt Boetcher - *There's An Innocent* (sundazed.com) *There's An Innocent* is a reissue from 60's producer and member of the psychedelic band The Millennium Curt Boetcher. This record radiates sunshine and good vibes with its country-folk-pop AM gold and out-there orch-pop arrangements. Boetcher's sweet soothing vocal delivery couldn't sound better. Fans of 60's and 70's pop and the sounds of Bread, Bad Finger, and Big Star will want to check this out.

Boulder - *Reaped In Half* (teepeerecords.com) These Cleveland maniacal metal shredders are back with their relentless balls to the wall Flying V British metal meltdown on their second full length Reaped In Half. If you couldn't get enough of 2000's Ravage and Savage you won't be disappointed for a second with their glorious duel Maiden/Thin Lizzy soaring melodies and driving riffs and good ol' heavy metal lyrics Boulder prove that they are indeed the shit.

Butthole Surfers - *Humpty Dumpty LSD* (buttholesurfers.com) I once met two restaurant managers named Dave and Dave back in the late 80's; they were watching the film *Altered States* and listening to Locust Abortion Technician at the same time. They also were both drinking tea with five hits of acid floating in each cup. The Butthole Surfers were the perfect soundtrack to those special kinds of moments and this 16-song collection of rare outtakes from various studio, home, and practice space recordings from '82-'92 captures that essence. If the last couple of Butthole albums kinda left you pining for the good ol' days, then here is your chance once again to love and appreciate this great American institution.

Canyon Creep - *Hijack The World!* (devildollrecords.com) Canyon Creep are a super fun rockin' SF Bay area trio that have low-end groove of ZZ Top and snarl and aggro licks of early Metallica and Motorhead. The tunes just make ya wanna grab a few six packs and a fat bag of weed and head for some dimly lit parking lot like you did back in high school and spark up and rock out.

Cassius - *Au Reeve* (astralwerks.com) Emerging from the same fertile electronic dance scene as Daft Punk, this French duo featuring two of the scene's most acclaimed producers Philippe Zdar and Hubert Blanc-Francart weave a large dose of good time 70's disco with more experimental electronic pop and do it well. Au Reve with its impeccable production and unique samples is sure to become a classic to both the dance crowd and experimental music fans.

Cee-Lo - *Cee-lo Green and His Perfect Imperfections* (Arista) Cee-lo, like his Atlanta brethren Outcast, doesn't fit the mold of most rap and hip-hop artists today opting to dig a little bit deeper lyrically and musically. He's not about the bling bling but rather pushing the limits and creatively drawing on more of cosmic vibe akin to grooves and soul of Funkadelic or Mandrill. Highly recommended.

Cirrus - *Counterfeit* (moonshine.com) Cirrus is a DJ duo with some good ideas but they're constant flashy and in-your face execution and uninspired lyrics wear thin quickly.

Daft Punk - *Discovery* (Virgin) Daft Punk is the shit, plain and simple. It took even myself a while to realize the sheer pop genius of this Parisian duo. Even for those pop lovers out there who loathe house music, these android pop architects understand the power of a great melody and have record collections you can bet are as big if not bigger than yours. *Discovery*, like *Homework*, reshapes and breathes a whole dimension into house music. Mixing the best elements of pop, new wave, funk, and disco Daft Punk demonstrate some of the most imaginative electronic pop since Kraftwerk came along . Recommend for picking up any lame party and "Digital Love" gets my vote for one of the best dance songs of all time.

Damn Personals - *Standing Still In The USA* (www.bigwheelrecreation.com) Saw these Boston boys a couple years back and remember being impressed at their reckless Replacements swagger and catchy late 70's skinny tie rock hooks and cocky stage presence. *Standing Still In The USA* captures the spirit of the band's live show and proves that that basic pop rock tunes done right is all you need.

Drive By Truckers - *Southern Rock Opera* (Lost Highway) This 2-CD set both tells the story of southern rock gods Lynyrd Skynyrd and how a young guitar player re-connects with his southern roots after moving north and trying to shed them through southern rock. DBT's music is a melodic and ragged brand of roots rock that brings to mind Crazyhorse or a more southern fried rockin' and reckless Wilco. It ain't bad and had me listening along for a while but at a certain point it made me just throw on some Skynyrd, so I guess they accomplished what they set out to do.

damn personals (photo j.sheffield; courtesy of big wheel recreation)

The Dukes of Hamburg - *Some Folks by the...* (gearheadrecords.com) What Deadbolt is to Link Ray, The Dukes are to the whole Nuggets thing. The wear big frumpy black mop-top wigs and claim to be from Germany but they really ain't. In fact they're an all-star garage band from SF featuring members of the Mummies, Phantom Surfers, and Hi-Hives, The Flakes and The Bobbyteens. On Some Folks The Dukes cover 14 60's standards in a Nuggets frat-rock kinda way. I'd imagine live they're a real hoot.

Steve Earle - *Jerusalem* (artemisrecords.com) Outlaw roots country rocker Steve Earle is pissing people off in all directions with his new record with the controversial cut "John Walker's Blues" based on American Taliban fighter John Walker Lindh. Which I don't think really sides with the guy as much as it just tries to tell his story. Well as far as the rest of the tunes on this disc are concerned they don't veer far from anything else Earle's done in the past, its the same gritty honest roots/bar rock that he's known for.

Earthride - *Taming of the Demons* (southerlord.com) Dave Sherman, bassist for D.C. doomsters Spirit Caravan, sings full time on this new side project, and man, does it slay. Not that Dave and the rest of the group are covering any new ground here but they just sound as if they're liquored up with nothin' to loose. Sherman's vocals sound a lot like Lemmy and the tunes could peel the paint off an old chopper frame in no time flat.

Earth Wind & Fire - *That's The Way of The World: Alive In '75* (Legacy/Columbia) When most people hear the words Sphinx or Pyramid they conjure up images of ancient Egypt. I think of Earth Wind & Fire album covers and their colorful Egyptian imagery and symbols. Between the time I was eight and ten it was simple: Kiss, ELO, Joe Walsh/ The Eagles, Styx, Boston, Fleetwood Mac, and Earth Wind & Fire. EW&F were in a universe of their own mixing the funk that came before with their own cosmic blend of esoteric and spiritual lyrics and their super good vibin' highly melodic style. There is no way you can listen to EW& F and not have a smile on your face; they just radiate love, positivity, and good times. That's The Way of The World: Alive In '75 captures the band at the height of their popularity from their legendary 1975 tour. A must have for serious funk and soul collectors.

El Gato - *We're Here* (elgatomusic.com) Dreamy lush pop rock with a big heart that will have you floating through heavily bodies with your headphones on.

Marianne Faithfull - *Kissin Time* (Virgin) The British husky voiced singer is back with what maybe her best release since 1980's *Broken English*. She gets a little help from Beck, Blur, Billy Corgan, Pulp's Jarvis Cocker, and Dave Stewart of the Eurhythmics. The result is a cutting edge batch of above average electro-art-pop songs.

Jay Farrar – *"ThirdShiftGrottoSlack" EP* (Artemis) On this five song EP, Jay gives us fans four new tunes to chew on and a funky remix of "Dame Shame."

Felix Da Housecat - *Kittenz And The Glitz* (Emperor Norton) Ever wondered what it might sound like if Kraftwerk and Gary Numan got together with a DJ and made soundtracks for porn films. Chicago house DJ Felix Da Housecat creates an 80's synthed-out electro dance floor groove that for some reason makes me think of the new wave avant flick Liquid Sky. Sexy female vocals are provided by Miss Kitten, which only adds to the camp value of this camp headphone masterpiece

Flaming Lips - *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots* (Warner Bros.) The cinematic Disney pop of *The Soft Bulletin* is gone and in is the steady paced electroid pop of Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots. Although less ambitious and mind-blowing than its predecessor, *Yoshimi* has it's captivating and shining moments that will satisfy most Lips fans. Not a let down but maybe not the record you'd hoped after their last, kinda they way you felt about *For Those About To Rock...* after *Back In Black* kicked your ass. It has its enjoyable moments but overall doesn't come close to the magic of its predecessor.

Flying Burrito Brothers - *Sin City: The Very Best of The Flying Burrito Brothers* (Universal) If you missed out on 2000's double disc set *Hot Burritos!* or have just caught wind of these 60's/70's country rock mavericks, then here is a your chance to see what all the fuss is about. The disc has the first two mandatory LPs, *Gilded Palace of Sin* and *Burrito Deluxe* , as well as a few other Parsons tracks. This collection is perfect for the newcomer or the completist.

Funkadelic-*Hardcore Jollies* (Remastered) (Priority Records/Capitol) 1976's *Hardcore Jollies* was Funkadelic's first LP for major label Warner Bros. after they left Westbound Records. On this record Funkadelic still retain their intergalactic fuzz guitar solo but have a bit more of a funky groove like Parliament. It's a really one of my all time favorites of the group I picked up the album in junior year of high school and wore out the grooves. The title track kicks booty and "Cosmic Slop" is the bomb. Buy this disc now ya won't regret it ya greasy little mofo.

Funkadelic-*One Nation Under A Groove* (Remastered) (Priority Records/Capitol) 78's *One Nation* is still Funkadelic but it's slicker and less fuzzed-out than its predecessors. The title track is probably one of the catchiest tunes in their entire catalog. "Promentalshitbackwashpsychosis Enema Squad (The Doodoo Chasers)" with its off-the-wall crude humor and the rockin' grooves and licks of "Lunchmeataphobia (Think! It Ain't Illegal Yet!)" are worth the price of the disc alone. Bernie Worrell's keyboard wizardry matched with the crisper guitar sound although may not have the organic feel of their earlier works, works in its own way. There's also a live version of "Maggot Brain" included, which is nice.

Funkadelic-*Uncle Jam Wants You* (Remastered) (Priority Records/Capitol) *Uncle Jam stylistically* is closer to Funkadelic's sister more radio friendly band Parliament than ever before with classic disco -funk jams like " Freak of The Weak" , and the tune that launched the career of 80's hip hop group De LA Soul "(Not Just) Knee Deep". The Uncle and his army are on a mission to save your ass from the dance music blah blah's. If you're a fan of Parliament's more disco oriented funk then is mandatory.

Funkadelic-*The Electric Spanking of War Babies* (Remastered) (Priority Records/Capitol) Like *Uncle Jam* 81's *The Electric Spanking of War Babies* is a super duper classic party album with Clinton's usual clever and humorous double entendres and political messages while the keyboards bounce, the bass pops, the guitar wails and the vocals echo and get tweaked. The last Funkadelic record before morphing with Parliament members into the P-Funk All Stars.

Geza X - *You Goddamn Kids* (dionysusrceords.com) This reissue of Geza 's lassic late 70's LP is beyond punk. He called it X music, which basically combines Afro rhythms and avant punk into a quirky jerky weirdo brand of music that will have giggling and bouncing off the walls simultaneously. Fans of early LA punk and the new wave of Oingo Boingo will go gaga over this disc.

Gomez - *In Our Gun* (Virgin) I'm sorry I missed out on the initial buzz surrounding this English band from a few years back cause they are simply in a category all their own. Gomez has the ability to blend experimental, electronica, blues, rock, and write a great pop song all at the same time. With three different vocalists the band is able give each tune its own personality. I especially like the singer who sounds uncannily like 70's-80's white soul sophisti- rocker Robert Palmer with his raspy vocals. In Our Gun is a disc that's all over the map stylistically but somehow retains its own feel and could easily be enjoyed by fans as diverse as Super Furry Animals to The Dead. Gomez is truly is pushing the envelope and coming up with some beautiful shit in the process.

Gorillaz - *G Sides* (Virgin) If can't get enough of the world's only fictional cartoon electro hip hop group then this B-sides collection has a some interesting tracks and some fun ear candy and catchy beats to hold you over till the their next full length as well as a few remixes of the debut including 2 different remixes of "19.2000" and the hit "Clint Eastwood".

Gorillaz - *Spacemonkeys verses Gorillaz-Laika Come Home* (astralwerks.com) If you went bananaz for the Gorillaz and you're a nutz for killa dub then you need to get on this as soon as possible. This disc is a reworking of the debut dub stylee and man is it good. This gets my vote for the headphone disc of the year hands down. Literally enough fuzz bass and tweaked out sound s that my brain felt like it was vibrating, literally.

The Hives (Photo by Laura Young; themodernage.org)

Nick Gilder - *Hot The Best of Nick Gilder: Hot Child In The City* (Razor & Tie) Some record exec over at Razor & Tie had the smarts and the balls to re-release great lost talents of the 70's including Walter Egan and now one hit wonder Nick Gilder. Here's the kicker though, as with Egan, Gilder should have been much more than a mere one hit wonder. Nick's material is so god damn great that it's criminal that he wasn't a superstar. "Hot Child In The City" wasn't really indicative of Nick's other tunes, yeah it grooved in a funky soft rock knida way but the rest of the collection is like Cheap Trick and The Sweet getting together to write some of the best glam power pop EVER written! If you still buy vinyl you have to hunt down Nick's amazing debut You Know Who You Are, it's a lost treasure to any rock n roll or glam or power pop fan out there. This comp has a handful from that LP as well as a few tracks form Nick's other two LPs City Nights and Frequency. This is a great collection of rock and pop tunes perfect for those hot summer nights.

The Hellacopters - *High Visibility* (gearheadrecords.com) If you missed out on the very limited edition double LP version of *High Visibility* that came out last year, here is finally your chance to hear the best Copters album since *Payin' The Dues* and one of the best ROCK albums in a long, long time. For those of you who were disappointed by the band's last release *Le Grande Rock*, the Copters have redeemed themselves by getting it right this time. *High Visibility* mixes the big stadium sized song structures from *Le Grande Rock*, the soul and passion of *Payin' the Dues* with the perfect production, not to mention the great songs.

The Hellacopters - *Cream of The Crap/Collected Non Album Works Volume 1* (gearheadrecords.com) If you were lazy or broke like my dumb ass back when these Swedes were releasing a new 7" every other week, then you'd already have heard most of this stuff. I've heard some but for those of you who don't have the entire collection and need another Copters fix since you've worn out your copy of High Visibility then you need to pick this up pronto.

Hello From Waveland - *Strange Ways* (mtfujirecords.com) Seattle's HFW is essentially an indie rock version of REM. I enjoyed some of the tunes in that collage rock kinda way but soon found myself getting bored with their pedestrian delivery.

Hermano - *...Only A Suggestion* (teepeerecords.com) Ex Kyuss front man John Garcia and oddly enough ex Afghan Whigs drummer Steve Earle and three other guys got together and cut this record which hits the right groove throughout the entire 8 songs. Hermano lays down heavy, brooding, powerful riffs and Garcia's vocals sound better than ever. This disc just cuts through the endless amount of stoner rock throwaways. Hopefully this becomes a full time band, we can only hope.

The Hives - *Veni Vidi Vicious* (Sire/Burning Heart/Epitaph) I missed the initial release of this 12 song disc which was released by Burning Heart back in 2000 and now like The White Stripes and The Strokes they be the new hot shit on the block so Warners scooped dem up and its all over KROCK. I don't know if they deserve all the frickin' accolades considering other bands of this ilk having been doing the same style for the last ten years. But what these Swedes do well is take early 60's rock n roll ala The Kinks and The Stones and bring it into the now with a punk pop edge that just kinda makes it jump out of your speakers. This could be the start of a new wave of real rock roll and hopefully it lasts for a while. Veni Vidi Vicious is a fun album from start to finish. Now when the Hellacopters break big over here then I'll know for sure the tide has really turned.

Hot Hot Heat - *Knock Knock Knock* (Sub Pop) This Vancouver four piece mix the hiccup vocals of Adam Ant with the post punk of the Fall and the new wave pop of Duran Duran. I don't know maybe I'm reluctant to listen to the current crop of bands doing the whole 80's revival thing because to me the 80's weren't that long ago. If you missed out on the New Romantics and new wave then this probably comes off as fresh and new and you'll probably think its great. Too bad Red Red Meat broke up they could have done a package tour together calling it the "Hot Hot Meat Tour".

Injected - *Burn It Black* (Island) This Atlanta four piece falls somewhere between sonic crunch of Quicksand and the early 90's grunge of Soundgarden with soaring stadium rock melodies. The band fell on my radar screen via the "Rock Show" on VH1 for the video of the song "Faithless," which is more passionate than most I've heard in today's weak modern rock climate. The rest of the disc unfortunately fails to kick your ass as much as the single does.

Jesus Eater (deathwishink.com) Jesus Eater is the new project from ex-Swiz front man Shawn Brown. No galloping guitars here, just simple stripped down mid tempo post hardcore rock with crunching guitars and Shawn's patent powerful scream. I'd like to hear a full length, this 4 song EP isn't bad but it's not amazing either.

John Brown's Body - *Spirits All Around Us* (shanachie.com) This Ithica NY band plays a smooth and authentic brand of roots reggae writing uplifting anthems of love and spirituality with a tight blend of horns, keyboards, percussion, guitars, and singer Kevin Kinsella's warm vocal style. Spirits All Around Us is one of the better contemporary roots reggae bands I've heard and definitely one of the best America has to offer.

Kinky (nettwerkamerica.com) This is the self titled disc from this Mexico City group fuses Latin rock, electronica and world beat sounds that although at times grooves nicely fails to get as spicy as their name would imply.

La Motta (lamottavshollywood.com) This LA based power pop trio features Sean Friesen of seminal Canadian power poppers The Asexuals as well as some contributing guitar work from Joey Santiago of Pixies fame. On their self-titled 10- song disc the group dishes out some chunky power pop with laid back airy vocals. Most of the disc fails to grab me except for the chugging melodic swagger of "Love California". La Motta isn't bad they're just so 1995.

Jason Lowenstein - *At Sixes And Sevens* (Sub Pop) Sebadoh's Jason Lowenstein writes twisting turning moody heartfelt melodic rock tunes that without even realizing attach themselves to your brain, which of course makes for repeated listens. A keeper.

Norah Jones - *Come Away With Me* (bluenote.com) Not since Fiona Apple have I heard such a far beyond her years talented and soulful female singer songwriter. Norah' s melodic and sultry blend of jazz, pop, blues, and folk would easily appeal to fans of Etta James, Carol King, and Joni Mitchell. Her super smooth velvety vocals and great sense of melody just has the power to melt through and touch your heart. If Come Away With Me is her debut I can only imagine what she'll be doing in five years from now.

Jucifer - *I Name You Destroyer* (vellocetterecords.com/jucifer.com) This Athens duo, a chick and a dude mix the Melvins and Mazzy Star to create a mammoth sound topped off with pretty female vocals. An interesting concept but it fails to hold my attention for more than couple o' tracks.

The Makers - *Strangest Parade* (subpop.com) Strangest Parade unlike the celebratory good time glam rock of Rock Star God is morose in mood and while still relies heavily on the glam vibe of its predecessor it has more of a singer songwriter approach that recalls the moodier moments off Let It Bleed, as well as Love's Forever Changes. There are few reckless rockin' moments here but generally the record it meant for hanging out in your bedroom as opposed to cruising' in your ride on a Saturday night.

Mammoth Volume - *The Early Years* (The Music Cartel) A collection of 17 early recordings from this Scandinavian band, who isn't afraid of mixing their varied influences up, most notably the heavy 70's fuzzy riffs of bands like Deep Purple and Sabbath with musical chops of prog bands like Jethro Tull, Pink Floyd, and King Crimson.

Marah - *Float Away With The Friday Night Gods* (artemisrecords.com) Philly roots rockers go pop on a disc that sounds like Paul Westerberg rocking out with Oasis. The band even gets a hand from the Boss himself who plays guitar and sings on the opening track "Float Away". There are some great pop songs here but unfortunately they suffer from the super slicked out multi-layered production.

MC5 - *Human Being Lawnmower: The Baddest & The Maddest of The MC5* (alive-totalenergy.com) Yet another MC5 collection, this time including some live, studio, and previously unreleased tracks as well as lengthy liner notes from the one and only John Sinclair. This disc is a must for hardcore MC5 fans.

Midget Handjob - *Midnight Snack Break At The Poodle Factory* (epitaph.com) Missed out when it was released backing 2000 but now I finally get a chance to hear one of my all time favorite punk personalities ex Black Flag/Circle Jerks nasally wisenheimer Keith Morris. Midget Handjob is Keith and company's a who's who of LA underground/indie musicians featuring members of Claw Hammer, That Dog, Lutefisk, Geraldine Fibbers, and Detox who take a stab at avant-garde bohemian jazzbo art rock. Keith doesn't sing but rather tells us listeners stories spoken word style that suck you in with his caustic wise ass eccentric mind and real life screw ball adventures that are the perfect antidote to bad late night TV.

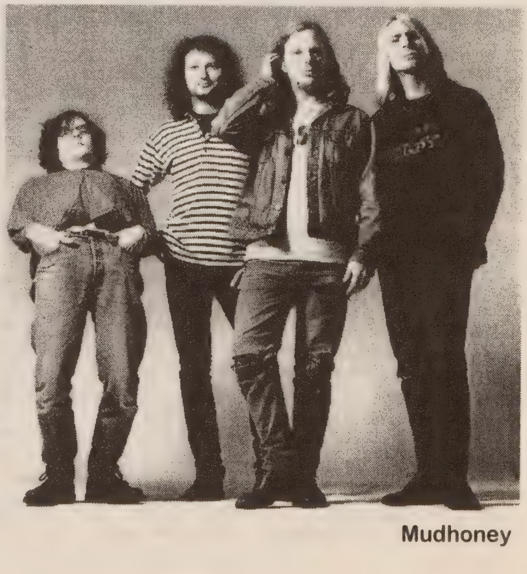
Miguel Migs - *Nude Tempo One* (astralwerks.com) If you dig future-retro house pumpin' beats and grooves and want to hear a disc that will transport you're mind and ass to another solar system then Nude Tempo One is essential. A collection of 16 electronica artists mixed by renowned DJ Miguel Migs is one of the best compilations in the entire Naked Music collection thus far.

Kylie Minogue - *Fever* (Capitol) Fever mixes the good time grooves of disco with the space funk of Daft Punk and irresistible hooks into a super batch of creative dance tracks. In a day and age when every other female singer is labeled as diva, Kylie really delivers a sound and spirit beyond her good looks that harkens back to the magic of 70's disco queens Cheryl Lynn and Donna Summer.

Money Mark - *Change Is Coming* (Emperor Norton) The fourth Beastie Boy is back with his third full length release, which shows a return to the instrumental format that we first heard of his debut, *Mark's Keyboard Repair*. This new effort drops the well crafted pop tunes from his last release *Push The Button*. Mark, like fellow Los Angelan Beck, is a genre hopper and does it seamlessly from samba, to funk, to easy listening. Change Is Coming maybe less engaging than Push The Button with the absence of vocals but it has a light hearted vibe that makes for great late afternoon or highway driving listening sessions.

Mudhoney - *Since We've Become Translucent* (SubPop) The granddaddies of ye ol' grung are back on the label they help put on the frickin' rock n roll map with their zillionth or so release. What the ol' gang serve up here is pretty much classic Mudhoney with addition of horns and other instrumentation. Hell they could've been doing this fopr the past five albums. I don't have a clue. I lost interest after the few albums. Anyhow this is a damn good album I'd have to say covering their classc fuzzed-out stomps, their 60's style garage stuff, and some weirder psyche tunes as well.

The Mushroom River Band - *Simsaiabim* (meteorcity.com) Not to be confused with 70's Aussie soft-rockers The Little River Band, these four Scandinavian bell bottom rockers sound like they're trying to take the stoner rock formula and inject what its been lacking, melody and big hooks. MRB accomplish this by infusing their super melodic Maiden styled guitars with big meaty grooves and powerhouse vocals. Think the burly brashness of Orange Goblin meets the hooks of the The Hellacopters with a tinge of 80's speed metal and you've got a pretty good idea of where MRB is coming from musically. Balls with hooks basically. So while they're kicking yer greasy longhaired ass they've got you tapping your toes at the same time. While not every tune on Simsaiabim is totally memorable the good ones are worth any stoner rock fan's hard earned bread.



Mudhoney

ashville Pussy - *Say Something Nasty* (artemisrecords.com) Blaine and Ruyter are back with their white trash thrash boogie, this time minus the Amazonian fire-breathing bass-playing bombshell Corey Parks, whose now playing bass with Dwayne Peters and The Huns. The music still shreds in that back wood ass Motorhead meets AC/DC meets the Nuge meets Skynyrd kinda way. Ruyter's slays as usual on guitar and Blaine's pissed off hick vocals and lyrics make the perfect soundtrack for any binge drinker's weekend getaway.

Orange Goblin - *Coup De Grace* (music-cartel.com) On *Coup De Grace*, England's Orange Goblin has done away with the Monster Magnet cosmic space rock effects and gone for a stripped down approach. Now if they could only start writing decent tunes...

Dolly Parton - *Halos & Horns* (sugarhillrecords.com) Luckily for folks who love old time country and not the embarrassing shit that Nashville tries to pass off as country these days, its become the trend for country music legends to return to their roots. On Halos & Horns as always Dolly sings from her heart with that unmistakable voice and gets back to her Smoky Mountain bluegrass roots with plenty of banjo and fiddle. Like ol' Merle, Dolly is still as valid a songwriter as she was when she first got her start. She even pulls off a convincing version of Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven".

The Pedestrians - *An Evening At Pearl's Hurricane* (dionysusrecords.com) This disc documents these Tucson local garage pop heroes covering Rick Derringer, Elvis Costello, The Zombies, Devo, Iggy, The Ramones, Tommy James, The Batman Theme, The Clash, and somehow put their own late 70's punky garage pop stamp on. The live atmosphere of the club makes this an exciting live document of the Tucson punk/new wave scene.

Phoenix - *United* (astralwerks.com) The French group Phoenix have a special talent in regurgitating Top 40 pop of the 80's and making it extremely palatable. Take a hint of 70's sophisti-pop influence of 10cc, mix that with 80's sophisti-pop of bands like Johnny Hates Jazz, mix that with 80's Herbie Hancock circa "Rocket" and some indie rock/pop flavor and you've got one great original band that could easily open for Beck's next US tour.

Playgroup (astralwerks.com) Playgroup is a project conceived by DJ/producer Trevor Jackson who employs the talents of Edwyn Collins, Kathleen Hanna, and reggae artist Shinehead. The result is a futuristic joyride through some of the deepest dance floor grooves and spaced-out samples and rockin' beats that you've ever heard.

Quarashi - *Jinx* (Time Bomb Recordings/Columbia) Icelandic rap ala the Beasties that doesn't break any new ground but the bands' enthusiasm is undeniably fun and enough to make any white nerd go ballistic while driving around in their Golf.

Queens of the Stone Age - *Songs For The Deaf* (Interscope) The reckless seedy bunch of Palm Desert dwellers are back with their highly anticipated third release, which showcases the drumming of Nirvana/Foo Fighter Dave Grohl as well some vocal tracks by ex Screaming Tree vocalist Mark Lanegan. QOTSA continue the ominous and minimalist sound they perfected on Rated R but also show a tad more diversity and melody like we heard on their debut. Not a bad record but I'm still waiting to be blown away again like I was from their debut.

Raging Slab - *(Pronounced -Eat Shit)* (teepeerecords.com) The Slab be back with their best since their early recordings way back in the mid 80's when they were on Jersey indie label Buy Hour Records. The cover of *(Pronounced -Eat Shit)* is a great parody on Skynyrd's debut album (Pronounced Leh-Nerd Skin-Nerd). And this time around they finally nail the production and get it right and make the record I always knew they had in em'. So do yourself a favor and except no substitutes; if it's sweaty southern boogie you need, your trailer has just arrived.

Raging Slab

River City High - *Won't Turn Down* (BWR/Doghouse) If these power pop rockers could only get away from the corny all-ages emo-punk love-song lyric,s and try to be a little more clever and rock n roll, they would totally rule. They have a great sense of melody and the Eddie Spaghetti wanna-be guitar player dude adds great catchy leads. At their best, they capture a highly infectious sound that falls between late 70's skinny tie power pop and the solid aggro edge and punch of late 80's emo trailblazers Samiam. At their worst, they come off as four guys who are trying to cash in on the whole current boy meets girl emo pop craze.

Rocket From The Tombs - *The Day The Earth Met The Rocket From The Tombs* (smog veil.com) Before Pere Ubu launched their avant-garde music on unsuspecting listeners, and The Dead Boys scared moms and dads with their lewd and snotty punk, the team of David Thomas, Peter Laughner, Craig Bell, and Cheetah Chrome formed the proto punk group Rocket From The Tombs. This amazing disc of rare live recordings from 75' gives us a great taste of a band that was onto something good. They're underground art punk n roll still sounds just as edgy and exciting today as I'm sure it was back then. The band covers of The Stooges "Search & Destroy" and "Raw Power" as well as The Stones "Satisfaction" and The Velvet's classic "Foggy Notion". We also hear a pre Ubu version of "30 Seconds over Tokyo" and pre Dead Boy's version of "Sonic Reducer". The Day The Earth Met The Rocket From The Tombs is essential for underground music lovers everywhere.

Rubyhorse - *Rise* (Island) This Irish five piece ain't bad for being radio friendly modern rockers. Singer Jay Joyce has a great raspy voice and the songs aren't crappy but well written pop tunes that are hard to shake once you've heard em'. Imagine the pop craft of the Beatles with a pinch of U2 and the MOR roots rock of Tom Petty and The Wallflowers and you've got an idea musically of where this Irish quintet are coming from. The band was even fortunate enough to get thee George Harrison to play slide on the track "Punchdrunk" before he passed.

Stereophonic Space Sounds Unlimited - *Jet Sound Inc.* (dionysusrecords.com) On SSU's third release they continue their incredible knack for making great instrumental pop that sounds like a Shag painting looks. On Jets Sounds Inc. the group sound just as swanky as ever and lay down a real spy vibe. The tunes on this disc could easily have been the soundtrack for such 60's groovy spy shows or flicks as U.NC.L.E. and Our Man Flint.

SuperBees - *High Volume* (acetate.com) The SuperBees hail from smogtown and play rippin' Detroit style punk n roll. Singer Dave James did time in 80's LA punk outfit The Joneses and has great feel to his voice that lends itself well to this style of music. For folks who love Detroit proto punk gods The Stooges and The MC5 and have become leery of every other Detroit style band that comes down the pike these days High Volume by The SuperBees will give you the sleazy rock n roll fix you've been craving.

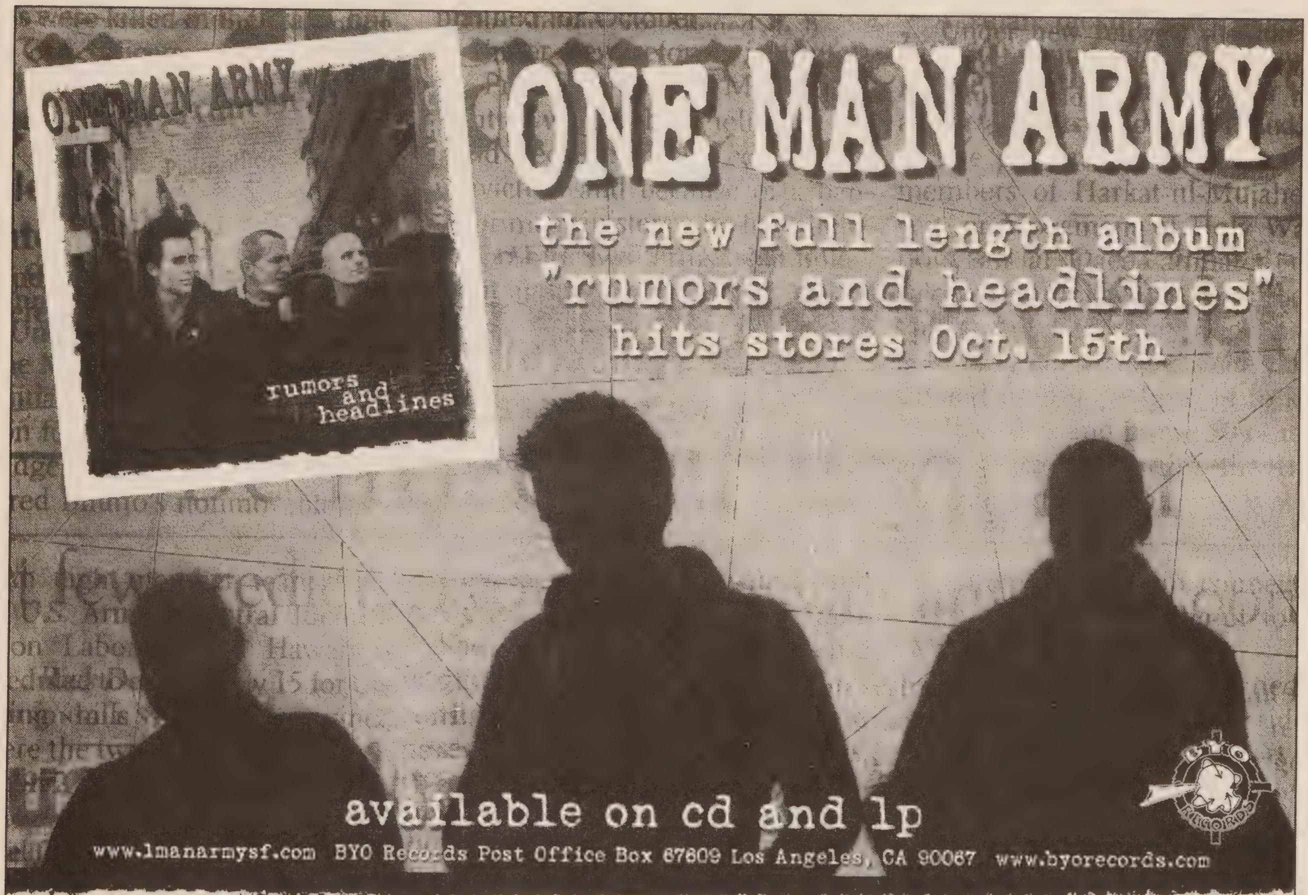
Superdrag - *Last Call for Vitriol* (arenarockrecordingco.com) I've said it before and I'll say it again: Superdrag are one of today's best and most under appreciated rock bands. That said, *Last Call for Vitriol* takes us even farther than 2000s' amazing *In The Valley of The Dying Stars* did. Yeah they've still got that knack for writing great Anglo pop tunes but now they're truly letting their southern and American roots take hold. Last Call for Vitriol is by far the group's best and most consistent work to date. John Davis is one of the greatest rock-pop songwriters we've got right now in the same way another Tennessee native, Alex Chilton was thirty years ago. Must be something in the water down there.

The Sunshine Fix - *Age of The Sun* (emperornorton.com) The Sunshine Fix is the pure pop project from Bill Doss of The Oliva Tremor Control. On Age of The Sun Doss doesn't fall to far from the tree keeping his Beachboys harmonies and Beatles psych pop intact but since OTC's other chief songwriter Will Cullen isn't in the picture the experimental side of OTC isn't present. If 60's sunshine pop is your thing then Age of The Sun is the record you've been waiting for.

Sons of Otis – "The Pusher" 10-inch Picture Disc (music -cartel.com) Canada's premier stoner rock band Sons of Otis try their hand at the classic biker rock of Steppenwolf's "The Pusher" and lay down the doomy bottom end that's on this nifty 10" picture disc.

Trans Am - *TA* (thrilljockey.com) Trans Am leave behind their experimental tendencies of their last record *The Red Line* and opt to dive head-first into 80's euro-synth madness. Hell, they shoulda called the record GNO short for Gary Numan Overdrive. At times it's pure genius in that tongue in cheek, Trans Am way and at other times they get bit carried away which can wear on the nerves after a while. Overall though *TA* is an interesting and fun listen that very Trans Am fan own.

Van Morrison - *Down The Road* (Universal) Not having followed the man's long musical career except for listening to a couple of his critically acclaimed earlier works like *Astral Weeks* and *Moondance*, I can't compare this disc to his more recent works; but for being an old timer, he's still got it. The record cover says it all with a photo of an old vintage record store with old blues and soul records up in the window. *Down The Road* may not be as passionate as his earlier works but it's almost as enjoyable a listen.



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Uncle Tupelo - *89/93:An Anthology* (Columbia/Legacy) The band who pretty much are responsible in many ways for the Alt-country movement within the past 10 years. By combing their love for punk-alternative-college rock with the music they were raised on as well as tapping into 70's country rock heroes The Flying Burritos. Uncle Tupelo somehow transcended the their time and space and easily could have been right at home opening for ol' Graham Parson's back in the 70's and would have been just as at home opening for say REM or The Replacements. Highly recommended to fans of Wilco and Son Volt.

Your Team Ring - *Home Life* (yourteamring.com) Imagine what it would sound like if The Residents got together with The Beatles circa Sgt. Peppers and Zappa and the Mothers circa Lumpy Gravy/Burnt Weeny Sandwich, and the Beach Boys circa Pet Sounds/Smile, then mix that with old time vaudeville instrumentation. Really eclectic orchestrated bizzaro tunes, like a pop band from another dimension. They make a band like Olivia Tremor Control sound almost uninventive and bland. I have a feeling this disc might get stuck in the CD player for a while.

COMPILATIONS

Blue Crush Soundtrack (Virgin) The end of the summer surfer chick flick that failed to make much of a splash at least has a semi-decent soundtrack. It features 11 tracks and tries to capture the carefree party vibe of the surfer lifestyle I guess. The best cuts are Nikka Costa's "Everybody Got Their Something", Beth Orton's "Daybreaker, Doves' "Firesuite", Play Group's "Front To Back" and the reggae of Chicken on "Big Love" .As for the Bannarama remake of "Cruel Summer" by Blestenation, like once was enough man. And as usual Lenny Kravitz proves that try as he may he'll never fall into the same category as his heroes Jimi, Prince, and Sly with his droll over processed super slick "If I Could Fall In Love", that's worse than Chinese water torture.

Carte Blanche 3 (astralwerks.com) Naked Music never seems to disappoint and on Carte Blanche 3 the winning streak continues with the this collection of groovin' mood music with deep sensual beats that musically features a mix jazz, soul, funk, house, and easy listening. Carte Blanche 3 is the perfect medicine after a long stressful day.

Defining Tech (orbisonic.com) Defining Tech is compilation of 14 artists who are truly on the cutting edge electronic music today. The comp features the likes of Bis, Fisherspooner, Peaches, Felix Da Housecat, Miss Kitten & The Hacker and nine others that will make yer feet move and your brain twitch.

Dogtown & Z-Boys Soundtrack (www.enjoyrecords.com) Before punk rock became the universal soundtrack for skateboard sessions, back in the 70's skaters needed aggro tunes to pump them up and fuel them to go for that fast and killer carve or grind above the blue tile of an empty pool and good old fashion ass-kickin' 70's rock was it. This soundtrack compiles some best bic-flicking rock tunes from those days of yore including Jimi Hendrix's "Ezy Ryder", James Gang's "Funk 49", ZZ Top's "La Grange", Thin Lizzy's "Bad Reputation", Joe Walsh's "Rocky Mountain Way" along with the proto punk and glam of The Stooge's "Gimme Danger", T. Rex's "Children of The Revolution" Alice Cooper's "Generation Landslide" and rounding out the soundtrack is the classic pop soul of Rod Stuart's "Maggie May". The soundtrack captures a moment in time before punk took over, when rock n roll was all you needed to cut loose and get things rollin.

Ghost World Soundtrack (shanachie.com) If you haven't already seen Terry Zwigoff's film adaptation of the Daniel Clowes comic of the same name then you missed out on one of the last year's funniest and quirkiest films. If you loved the film you'll love the soundtrack with its rare blues taken from old 78's, you can actually hear the crackles and pops from the records. The disc also contains old time jazz and West Indian music as well as the insanely hilarious "Cotton Pickin' Blues from the equally as funny fictional blues rock group in the film Blues Hammer. Overall this soundtrack is a real treat and isn't out there as a marketing tool for the record company or for promoting the film. It's just a great collection of songs with some funny moments thrown in for a good laugh.

Easy Rock (Razor & Tie) The only 70's and early 80's collection of soft rock classics for all you suave Casanovas out there that will be sure to get your special someone's fondue pot cookin' to a fine medium boil. Seventeen sizzling tracks from Michael McDonald, Kenny Loggins, Rupert Holmes, Earth Wind & Fire, The Doobie Brothers, Little River Band, Nick Gilder, Exile, and oh yeah...Ambrosia. Such irresistible numbers as "Escape (The Pina Colada Song)", "What A Fool Believes", "Biggest Part of Me", "I'd Really Love To See You Tonight", "Kiss You All Over", and "This is It" are just some of the unforgettable magic moments on this collection that will set the night on fire.

How We Rock (epitaph.com) Gotta hand it to Epitaph they put together one hell of a mixed disc with this little puppy. From start to finish How We Rock proves that rock is alive and well and thriving. The comp features Scandinavian groups The Hives, Turbo Negro, Sahara Hot Nights, The Hellacopters, Glucifer, and The International Noise Conspiracy as well as some of the best ass kickin' American rock bands including: Supersuckers, Electric Frankenstein, The Donnas, The Dwarves, Zeke, and Rocket From The Crypt. This honestly is one of the best rock comps I've had the pleasure of listening to in a long long time. No hitting the skip button here.

The Kid Stays In The Picture Soundtrack- (Milan Entertianment,) Haven't seen the flick yet but I'm dying too. You know the documentary about Robert Evens, only one of the most colorful Hollywood movers and shakers to conqueror Tinsel town only to be spit out and then climb back for more. Movie Producer to be exact, he produced such groundbreaking films as Rosemary's Baby and The Godfather. At any rate I heard the movie is an amazing shot of a Hollywood mogul's amazing life. The soundtrack /score is about three quarters a score and covers musical styles from Hollywood's Golden Age in the 30's till present day with even the mighty or once mighty Slash contributing a track. My personal picks are Steely Dan's "Dirty Work" one of my all times faves as well as the ass kickin' booty shakin' Commodore's instrumental classic "Machine Gun". The original scores pieces were composed by Jeff Danna who does a great job of recreating moods and time periods of a world that most people only dream about. Recommended for stricly fans of the flick and soundtrack collectors.

Monster Disco (Razor & Tie) A decent collection of 70's disco hits. The comp contains such dance floor classics as The Emotion's "Best of My Love", Cheryl Lynns' "Got to Be Real", Heatwaves' "Boogie Nights", A Taste of Honey's "Boogie Woogie Oogie", Rose Royce's theme to Car Wash as well as the usual standards such as "Macho Man", "We Are Family", "I will Survive", "Knock on Wood", "More Than A Woman" and eight others. Not a bad comp to have on hand as a great remedy for you're next snore-a-than party or to simply pick you up when you're feeling like hell cause life didn't turn out the way you had planned.

My House in Montmartre (astralwerks.com) My House in Montmartre is a collection of some of the hottest techno and electronica tracks to come out of France within the last five years. The collection featuring daft Punk, Phoenix, Air, Cassius, Superfunk, and Stardust just to name a few. If you are interested in checking out one of the most exciting music scenes around right now this a perfect place to start.

Rock This (Razor & Tie) Unless you were born in the late 80's or 90's you know most of these tunes whether you want to or not. Personally I know them well. I grew up on most of these classic rock and corporate rock tunes. Be it in my sister's room listening to her eight tracks, hanging out at the arcade, or roller-skating to them on the weekends at Skateland. The disc includes tracks by Boston, Heart, Foreigner, Bad Company, Styx, J.Geils Band, BOC, Peter Frampton, Doobie Bros., The Nug, REO Chuckwagon, The Cars, Pat Benatar, Loverboy, Toto, Eddie Money, 38 Special, and yes Meatloaf.

Super 70's (Razor & Tie) Yet another collection of 70's hits from the folks at Razor & Tie who are in the running to become The Ronco or K-Tel of today's pop and rock market place. That s more than fine with me considering I grew up with a lot of those comps that featured on one LP everyone from English Glam rockers The Sweet to R& B funksters Hot Chocolate to soft rockers Firefall. The comps were a real grab bag of styles and tunes that really blurred the lines of music and opened my mind to music as a young kid. Super 70's follows in the great tradition of those two record labels in packing as much tunes an d styles on to well in this case 2 discs for you're buck. The collection includes tracks from: ELO, KC, Frampton, Rod, Isaac Hayes, Ozark Mountain Daredevils, The Knack, Todd Rundgren, 10cc, The Allman Bros and 22 more.

DVD-VIDEO

D.A.F.T. - A Story About Dogs, Androids, Firemen and Tomatoes (Virgin) Released in 1999 this DVD collection compiles 4 daft Punk videos. They're more like short films though and have been directed by the hippest of today's film makers including: Spike Jonze (who also appears in it), Roman Coppola, Seb Janak, and Michel Gondry The shorts are surreal pop art that have a loose story lines but instantly suck you in with their eye popping visuals. There is also a lovable dog character that is eerily reminiscent of McGruff the crime fighting dog but without the hard-assed attitude. If you dig Daft Punk you may already own this, if you don't you need to track it down.

Dogtown and Z-Boys Home Video (sonypicturescalssics.com) A documentary in only the sense its not fiction cause nobody in their wildest dreams could have dreamt up this gnarly gang of surf/skate rats from Venice/Santa Monica revolution skateboarding in 70's. The film was directed by former the film chronicles the environment and scene that shaped these young radical skate pioneers and with their reckless go- for it surf style changed the face of modern day skateboarding. They were the first guys skating empty swimming pools and the first guys to successfully pull off arial maneuvers. Skate legends such as Tony Alva, Jay Adams, Shogo Kubo, Bob Biniak, Peralta, and others are interviewed and shown in rare footage skating pools, banks, parks, and contests. The film also simultaneously chronicles the history of the sport and the impact that the whole Dogtown scene and attitude has had not on skateboarding, but the whole Extreme sports phenomenon as we know it. There'd be no Tony Hawk if it weren't for this motle bunch of rag head teens. Even if you couldn't give a rat's ass about skateboarding this film is highly recommended. It totally takes you there and feels like rock n roll with its killer classic rock and heavy metal soundtrack of Sabbath, BOC, The Nug, Zep, James Gang, ZZ Top, Alice Cooper, and Thin Lizzy. I know personally of a lot of old timers who've dusted their boards off and started riding again since seeing it.

ACID CABARET Self-titled 17 song CD (Haywire Productions, Box 157, Pine Brook, N.J.,07058). This is frontman Ed Alstrom, who sings and plays piano, backed up by Jeff Ganz on bass and Don Guinta on drums. Ed is not bad as a singer and tickles the ivories quite well. I thought this was a tribute album when I first listened to it; each number sounds a bit different. I was hearing B.B, King ,John Lee Hooker, Miles Davis and even a bit of Joe Cocker to keep the audience awake. Seemed like a Blues/Jazz album at first but, well, there is more to it than that. Songs range from originals composed by Ed to songs composed by such diverse folks as Gilbert & Sullivan and Donnie & David Was. Ed has performed with Bette Midler, Dion, Lou Rawls, Chuck Berry and a long list of others. You get the idea.

CARISSA'S WIERD - Songs About Leaving (Sad Robot Records, P.O. Box 3171, Seattle WA, 98114). Not only do they spell weird differently, they do a different sort of music. Fairly solidly in the soft rock/pop/acoustic spectra, many of the dozen songs on this album are of an eclectic quality, elusive to define or describe while being effective at entertaining and infusing your mind and soul with their sounds and message. Jenn Ghetto has a sensual, almost surreal voice which weaves tapestries in the listener's mind. Co-vocalist & songwriter Mat Brooke has a quite good voice. With the assistance of Sarah Standard's fabulous violin playing, Jeff Hellis with virtuoso piano performances, and Ben Bridwell beating the drums, they conceived, constructed and concocted an absolute delight of an album to listen to many, many times. With the infectious sound of Jenn's voice circulating inside my head, I will set this one aside for another day. Many other days. Strongly recommended.

ADAM LIPPMAN - Lo-Fi, High Maintenance (60 Crescent St. #11, Stamford, CT 06906) This 30 year old lad started playing music about 21 years ago and has spent time in a number of bands in Connecticut and NY. The band NAKED JENNIFER has an intriguing title; he was bassist for that alt-rock group. He also did a solo synth project & has played rhythm guitarist for awhile and bassist for NY band SUPPLE. This solo project shows signs of all that history. I hated this one at first; the first few tracks and some others have some sort of synthetic, futuristic instrumental material which had me wondering where the hell Mick Hale's old techno-danse music column went to. However, the album evolved into some very damned good rock-type music which is great to listen to and is infectious: I find myself trying (unsuccessfully of course) to sing some of these songs. Personally, if he had stuck to traditional rock instrumentation, I would have called this a great album and would have listened to it 100 times instead of the 40 or so I have listened to it so far. Mind you, I expect to listen to it again someday. The weird noises are not enough to detract from the richness of Adam's voice and the fine songs. Hell, perhaps they add to it. Check it out.

the leighton listen

by rodney leighton

SAM D'ANGELO - Nothing Left But Hope (Sad Records, 443 Twinn Drive, Dayton, OH 45431) Sam used to have a band with his brother and some friends back in the 80s, which was disbanded in 1990. He took a hiatus from music and then started writing songs, launched his record label and put out this 12-track number., of which he wrote 8 songs, coauthored one and sung them all. Although portions of this record sound fairly similar to the Bare Naked Ladies, it appears that Sam didn't have too much help. There is no list of musicians or instruments or lyrics but my guess is that it is mostly Sam, a guitar or two, and brother Joe and a drumkit. Basic rock & roll. The religion based "Psalm" is probably the best song on the disc although their cover of the old standard "In The Wee Small Hours Of The Morning" may be the best. All good songs; mostly well performed. Quite good album.

JACK HAYTER - Practical Wireless (Absolutely Kosher Records) This guy is also frontman for UK pop group HEFNER. 12 tracks of folksy pop rock which verges on spoken word at times with minimal instrumentation. CD is listed at $15.98 which makes it overpriced by $15 in my humble opinion.

SAY HI TO YOUR MOM - Discosadness (P.O. Box 2142 New York, NY 10009) This is a boy named Eric. I'm quite sure it's not my brother; other than that, all I know is that the lad was born and reared in L.A. and now lives in NYC where he writes quite good pop/soft-rock tunes and records them in his bedroom in Manhattan. Songs about love and life and death; about sci fi and vampires and robots; and dying of tetanus and other such mundane topics. Playing guitars and various electronic gadgets, he creates a fairly decent album. There are a couple of duds. "Kill The Cat" starts out well but degenerates into multiple repetitions of those three words, rendering a decent little song into annoying garbage. "Unless The Laker Game Was On" is the only song in which some of the lyrics are indiscernible and is a rather overly loud exercise in silliness. But, hell, two duds out of ten songs ain't half bad for a boy making music in his bedroom. Although I suspect 8 plays is enough of this one for me, you should check it out for yourselves.

MARYKATE O'NEIL (www.marykateoneil.com) A superb debut album of 14 songs. Produced by the very talented Jill Sobule who lends her wonderful voice to some tunes and co-wrote a number of songs as well as, quote" programming all kinds of fake instruments". Ms. O'Neil comes from Massachusetts; she was singer/songwriter for Boston based PIEWACKIT which landed in California and went bust. Marykate moved to NYC where she wrote songs. My first reaction was that this singer reminded me of Jane Weidlin; later I thought that it was more as if everyone in The Go Go's had done lead vocals, as she shuffles style quite a bit. Songs are primarily pop with a message. She covers "STOP" by The Spice Girls to show she can do bubblegum, I guess. Sounds good. A couple of songs near the end are quite upbeat, almost soft rock territory. All the songs co- written by Jill Sobule are basically what one would expect from Jill: excellent pop tunes with a strong message for those who wish to listen closely, songs which one can enjoy listening to for hours with no brain work but which leave messages in your head. "Bedsore Brain" contains the lyrics: "I'm exhausted". You ain't the only one, babe, says I. And she immediately turns into a 20 year old Belinda Carlisle, rocking out like mad. One of those CDs I play for weeks; after something like 200 spins, I convinced myself to take it out of the player long enough to review some of the dozen CDs I have on hand. Go buy a copy. If you can't find one, try emailing recordings71@aol.com. I'm keeping this one.

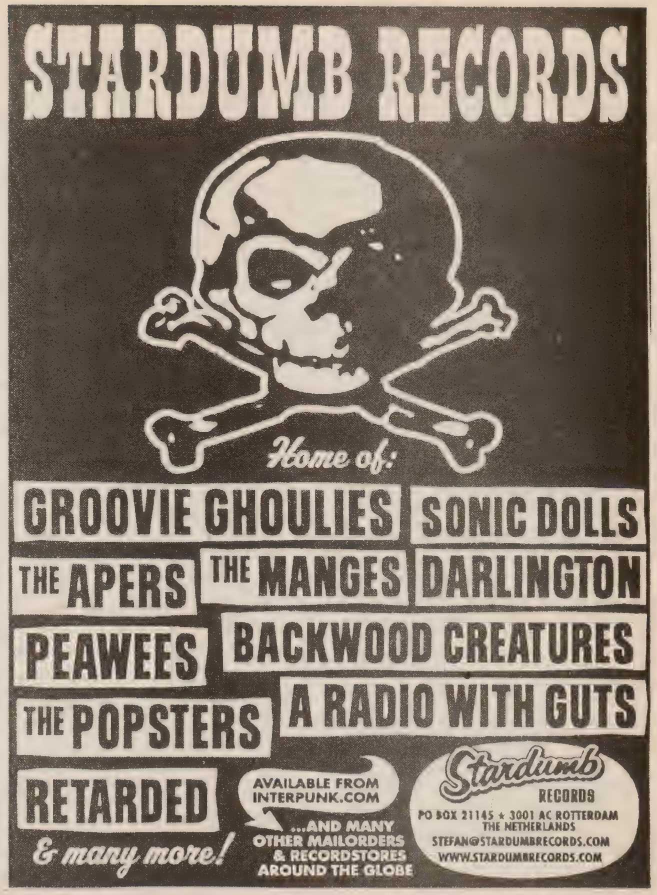
BREE SHARP - More B.S. (Ahimsa Records.)I saw this babe do a song on a Lillith Fair TV show and thought she greatly resembled a young Joan Jett. Doing a cover of Don Henley's "Boys of Summer" on this album, she sounds like a hyper Sheryl Crow. While comparisons to such great performers is complimentary, she also has a voice of her own; one which varies a bit, from sugary pop to driving rock to soap opera silliness to delightful countrified rock . According to the promo stuff, "Galaxy Song" is being well received although I consider it the sole dud on the 10 song CD. "Dirty Magazine," an amusing countrified tilt of the hat to sexy ladies who display their assets, is quite fun albeit the line " I ain't no beauty queen" falls well within the bullshit category. However, very little else does. Lots of societal commentary within the lyrics of catchy, delightful rock tunes. I wasn't provided any info on band members or such: she wrote most of the songs, sings them all, very well, and I know from the TV appearance that she plays guitar just like Joan Jett. That's all I know. Except that it's a hell of a good album. Definite keeper.

JILL OLSON - My Best Yesterday (www.innerstate.com) Yahoo! What a great record. More country than Shania has ever been, this lady still delivers songs with a pop sensibility. Jill is part of RED MEAT, an alt-country band from San Francisco. Promo sheet suggests that band is more country than this release. They must sound like Flatt & Scruggs or something then. Eleven great songs here, with 10 originals. She writes, on the liner notes, "I hope these pop tunes remind you of the sounds that might have blasted from the radio of a brand new 1966 Ford Ranchero, way back before you were born." I got news for you, lady: I started college that year. Her singing reminds me somewhat of Lynn Anderson, a name which means absolutely nothing to anyone reading this, but who was fairly popular in the late 60s. The sound does resemble what used to come out of the speakers of the '55 Chevy I was driving. Also sounds something like Terri Clark, a modern day country warrior. An absolutely delightful, wonderful album; I have been playing it to death. Punk folk won't like it; anyone who likes great songs, delightful singing and excellent backup instrumentation in a popish country vein needs to find themselves a copy of this CD. I ain't giving this one to anyone.

SIXTY STORIES / PAINTED THIN Split CD (Smallman Records, Box 352, Winnipeg, MB., Canada, R3M 3V3) Paul Furgale was the bassist and vocalist for PAINTED THIN, a 3 person punk band which made a tour to Germany in which a guy paid to have a record made, entitled A Loveless Kiss. Back in Winnipeg, Jo Snyder was writing personal songs and playing guitars; Keli Martin was playing with her bass. These two formed a duo; decided they needed a drummer. Paul, footloose with no band now, put away his bass and started beating drums.. They tried a bunch of names and ended up with SIXTY STORIES. Smaliman wanted to release a 7 song disc entitled Different Places To Sit. Paul persuaded them to put A Loveless Kiss on the CD as well. Personally, they could have left it off. Jo sings really well, with a very nice voice; Keli knows how to make her bass talk and Paul does well with the drums. Oh yeah, they list as the fourth band member.."A Computer". Seven songs of a personal nature; I call it Moderate Rock. With punk tendencis. Very good stuff. Painted Thin's 5 songs are straight ahead political punk rock. While I think it is a good thing that Paul keeps quiet while playing drums for Sixty Stories, he is not a bad vocalist. These tunes are not exactly my bag but I recognize they are good. Hell, Johnny Puke might even like them. I wonder why I don't get more Canadian releases. Sixty Stories plan a full length release later this year; hopefully I will get it.

SHELLITO - Ingredients.(www.shellito.com.). Anyone remember Men Without Hats? I didn't think so. .Probably no sense in telling you that this release reminded me of that long defunct pop trio, which is actually kind of weird in that Mike Shellito is the lead singer and driving force on this album and MWH had a duo, one female, who shared vocals. Lots of people guest star on *Ingredients*, including a couple of gals. (Why can I remember a silly pop ditty from a dozen years ago and not remember what I had for supper?) The final tune on this 12 track release is entitled: "Tired," and has lyrics like :" I'm tired, tired, tired." That song I can relate to very well. There is also a song entitled "Jim' but I don't think it has any relevance to the boss. I could have done without the gaggle of human geese chattering at the end of the recording; otherwise, this is a very good pop release. Good mixture of old fashioned straight up pop, new wave strange pop and sonic mixtures of vocals and instrumentation.

JP JONES - Salvation Street (Vision Company Records). A great slab of music running about 70 minutes. Sixteen tracks listed, which range from one one which has sometimes-backup vocalist Barb Schloff-Arietta wailing for 32 seconds to "Long Blue Train," which is a great orchestral country rock tune which sounds like Garth Brooks. "And The Thunder Rolled" sounds like Garth's alter-ego, whatever that name is, and runs 8:28. These songs were written by JP between 1984 and 2001 and produced by Andy Jones. JP provides lead vocals in a somewhat diffuse style, ranging from pop to countrified rock to folk to something else. He also plays harmonica, keyboards, guitars and "rain stick". Kurt Meyer provides fine bass on 13 tracks; 6 other guys appear on various tunes, playing guitars, cello, drums, viola and piano. Two ladies do vocals on some songs. Final track is all JP. Most of these guys appear to be almost as old as me; centerfold has a wonderful photo gallery. "Mole In The Ground" is excruciatingly bad; I have no idea what he was trying to do here. But everything else is good to great. "Tiger Woods" is an amusing paean to that golf phenom. "Now It's Up To You" is some sort of comedic salute to rock icons, bringing in Elvis and Dylan and makin fun of silly folks. "Almost Satisfied" runs 8:23 and is a great ballad. This is one hell of a good release, well worth finding and listening to a few dozen times. I have heard it all 4 times so far and will definitely play it again sometime when there is no new music to review.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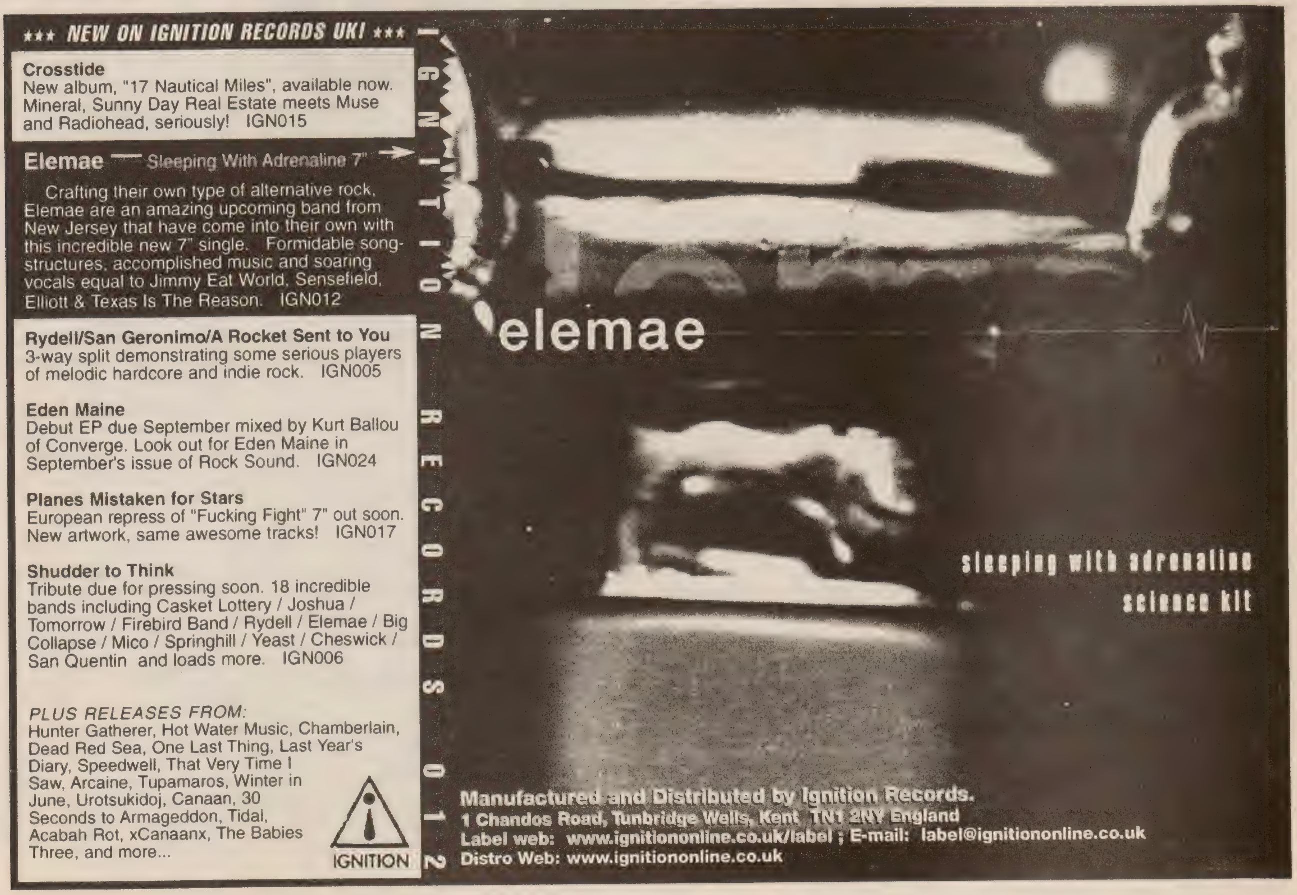
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SOUND TO COLOR

by chuck x. wharton

As a teenaged guitarist, trombonist, singer and...could you put a harmonica in their somewhere...my many fine teachers would complain at times of an unpleasant "color" in my sound and would ask me to change to a different color – darker, lighter, grayer, bluer.

I had no idea what these men and women were talking about. It was such a relief to spend the weekends with the crazy bands I sang and played with, where performing from the soul satisfied everyone. Until now. I have just an idea of what colors mean in music and all the records reviewed below have them.

First of all, a smart man who patented the **Color Organ** in 1893 and somehow created color-performances of works by Wagner, Chopin, Bach and others, would sympathize with my early confusion. While biographical works on Alexander Wallace Rimington (1854-1918) make me think he is one of the inventors, if not the only inventor, of today's concert light show, he thought you could easily make too much of a study of the differences between musical pitch and color.

Rimington's color organ was an electric, 14-octave, soundless keyboard connected to lenses, filters and lamps. He had a pianist accompany performances. Russian composer Alexander Scriabin picked up on Rimington's work and created *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* in 1910 to be performed with a light show. Scriabin took Rimington's adventures with musical color even more literally.

For Scriabin, a pitch corresponded to a color and volume shaded the color, as explained by Frank Popper in *Origins and Development of Kinetic Art*, 1968. Scriabin expressed great disappointment in *Prometheus* performances in Moscow and Carnegie Hall, because the color screen was so small and so far behind his orchestra, the audiences didn't care.

Tom Douglas Jones did more color-sampling from the past in *The Art of Light And Color*, 1972.

"Scriabin's attention was first seriously drawn to his colored hearing owing to an experience at a concert in Paris, where sitting next to his fellow countryman and composer Rimsky-Korsakov, he remarked that the piece to which they were listing (in D major) seemed to him yellow; whereupon his neighbor replied that to him, too, the color seemed golden...He admits, however, that whereas to him the key of F-sharp major appears violet, to Rimsky-Korsakov it appears green; but this derivation he attributed to an accidental association with the color of leaves and grass arising from the frequent use of this key for pastoral music," Jones said, quoting Dr. D.S. Meyers, a psychologist.

Jones goes on to say Beethoven called B minor the black key; Schubert called E minor like a maiden robed in white with a rose-red bow; and Rimsky-Korsakov saw C major as sunlight and F-sharp as strawberry red.

Finally, Wassily Kandinski leads me to my easiest understood system in his *The Spiritual in Art* in 1912, with Yellow as going with lighter tones; Orange belonging to medium-pitch sounds such as church bells or a low woman's voice; Red, tuba and powerful drumbeats; Purple, high and clear singing tones, including violin and jingling bells; Violet, deep instruments, including the bassoon; Blue, the bass; Green, drawn-out, meditative violin playing.

We'll have to figure out where distorted guitar goes, but I vote for red when it's in a pop-punk song and green when it's in a slow metal, hardcore, or goth song. In the end, this is all so subjective, just get out your assorted markers and highlight, anyway you like, the reviews that follow. If you're like me, the markers are inside us, like old Scriabin.

I think it's all right to remix the colors, too.

Records

Audio Karate - *Space Camp* (Kung Fu Records, PO Box 38009, Hollywood CA 90038 www.kungfurecords.com) The pop-punk is led by excellent lead guitar in 12 tracks on this record. My favorite is *Drama Club Romance*, "Curtain's on the rise. In the moment of surprise when you find a part to play, don't let it get away." But all songs are imaginative, where Nintendo games become relationships and a football game one Friday night the senior year in high school tumbles into the challenges of adulthood. Outstanding.

Avoid One Thing (Side One Dummy, 6201 Sunset Blvd. #211, Hollywood CA 90028 www.sideonedummy.com) This punk is founded in hard rock licks. It gets best in a tale of revenge, *Backyard Joey*, "Never been into doing what you'd say. You'd kick my feet right out from under me. Now you're gone. Are you getting what you need?" Some of the 11 tracks slow the pace a bit, such as *Lean on Sheena*, but always expect some hard rock with ethereal distortion on the guitars.

The Chinkees - *Searching for a Brighter Future* (Asian Man Records, PO Box 35585, Monte Sereno CA 95030 www.asianmanrecords.com) Ska, like punk, never dies, but the records sometimes start differently. This ska record starts with digital DJ scratches. And *Market Place* starts off like an old Exploited tune, then turns into what for the life of me could be an authentic Jamaican folk ballad. There're 13 tracks like that to explore, including a song written by Tim Armstrong and Operation Ivy.

Death of Marat - *All Eyes Open* (Stickfigure Records, PO Box 55462 Atlanta, GA 30308 www.stickfiguredistro.com) Touches of hardcore, goth and surf sound out from this trio's work. The synergy comes from the strength of their 10 tracks of strange lyrics, especially songs like *Apollo Liftoff*, "Days are lasting forever, waiting for blood to clot. So are we fortunate enough now?" I can't put my finger on a meaning, but oddly enough I believe there is one. Some ferocious strumming and drumming throughout.

Home Grown - *Kings of Pop* (Drive Thru Records, PO Box 55234, Sherman Oaks CA 91413 www.drivethrurecords.com) It's not hard rock; then again, it's definitely not light. The challenge from the band, "Forget everything you *thought* you knew about Home Grown." Vocalist-bassist Adam Lohrbach says the band has changed its style. I hear in the 12 tracks more of an evolving, still grounded in the punk in which the musicians previously wove their ska and pop influences. In *You're Not Alone*, I hear musical dream sequencing such as I haven't heard since the early 1970s in post-psychedelic rock. Then the song pounds off into accessible rock. I'd say that's change.

MU330 *Ultra Panic* (Asian Man Records) Yep. They're still the band pounding out the ska-punk, beginning with a hard circus ska entry, *Raw Fish*. I knew I could count on them. As sung in *Tell Another One*, "I think just like you do. I'm not your idiot." I say I can count on them, but within their consistently fine musical arrangements and well-rendered lyrics, I think the guitar playing has progressed well in this recording. As the refrain goes in *Oh My God*, "What I have done." And as in other MU330 records I have enjoyed, there is a strange, concise and startling story-song that always sticks in my mind. On this one, it is the unforgettably short *KKK Hiway*, "Did you know that the KKK adopted a highway just a few miles away from my Mom's house...They get to dress up in sheets and pick up the trash." I won't get that vision out of my head anytime soon

Pitch Black (Revelation Records, PO Box 5232, Huntington Beach CA 92615-5232 www.RevolutionRecords.Com) From the jack-o-lantern and crossbones to the ghoulish woman with the veiny heart, I expect classic goth. "The contracts were signed in blood," reads advance release information. What I get is pretty exciting speed-metal-punk as I haven't heard in awhile. Vocals on *Half Empty* move methodically from the snotty punk, pervasive throughout the 11 tracks, to hardcore near-screaming. Several songs indeed do use a macabre theme, as *Doctor's Orders*, which features a solemn bell tolling for thee, then launches a speed-metal.rocket. This stuff'll actually raise your pulse.

The Plus Ones - *It's A Calling* (Asian Man Records) In 11 tracks, they solidly rock in that knee-pivoting, heel-pounding way. They even mockedly pound out a child's melody in *All The Boys*, "You say it's your first time backstage at the Troubadour, at the Troubadour, at the Troubadour." Maybe it's just a few years since I've heard a punk-oriented band from sawing out songs like this, but I realize now I've been ready for it for awhile, I've missed it, the guitar solos are way above average and I'm glad this band came along.

Reel Big Fish - *Cheer Up* (Jive/Mojo) Aptly named, this is, because it's all very cheery pop rock with a bit of an edge. *Suckers* gets back to the light ska-punk that the band's core audience counts on, except now they've added some dub-like percussion on the bridge that's very welcome. The best number is the fine third-wave style ska piece *A Little Doubt Goes A Long Way*, which features outstanding solo trombone.

SGR - *The Tenby Chase* (Sonance Records, PO Box 89, Ambler PA 19002 www.sonancerecords.com) This South Jersey ensemble comes to the rescue of the ska-starved. They rock a little and even rap impressively in triplets. *21 And Nowhere* is the most welcome entry both instrumentally and lyrically, "I know at the end of the day I won't be able to say my name." The hardest number is *Saving Grace Revival*, using horns and distorted lead and rhythm guitars in one of the most solid song arrangements I've heard recently. I like where these guys and their 13 tracks are going.

Satanic Surfers - *unconsciously confined* (Hopeless Records/Bad Taste Records, 7702 Balboa Blvd. #3, Van Nuys CA 91406) As much as the name may disturb some, this actually is a good pop-punk band with fine vocals and well-enunciated English lyrics. I especially admire *4 a.m.*, "They were fighting outside my window. I heard a bottle smashed to the street. There was blood on the sidewalk." This testimony to police becomes an engaging melody. The 13 tracks move quickly, which must musically represent catching tasty waves.

Short Round - *Language* (Asian Man Records) The first of 10 intensely rendered tracks captures and holds me, *The Alcohol Talking.* All feature excellent vocals and outstanding drumming. I especially like their ska entry, *Cleansing, Cut and Scrape*, which colors the CD differently from the rest of their pop-punk themes, but offers the consistent rich guitar chords and vocals. The CD will give your mega-bass system a good workout.

Slick Shoes (Tooth And Nail Records, PO Box 12698, Seattle WA 98111 www.toothandnail.com) While these musicians offer up some serious lyrics, my favorite effort is *Friday Night* and that's all it's about. "Let's go. Let's have some fun tonight." I'm going to request this one in my kickboxing class, which is about all the fun I get on Friday night. It's difficult for me to focus much more on the lyrics because of the exemplary guitar playing on this record. I'll attempt from *No More Words*, "Please help me make it through today. By now all security seems gone." Are there really people brave enough to ask for such help?

The Toasters - *Enemy of the System* (Asian Man Records) Remember those fun ska bands that would play the colleges and surrounding areas where you did that funny leg dance? Remember no longer. This band's still here and still doing it, beginning with a cover of the *Soulfinger* by The Bar-Kays. After treating us with a flight to the fun days of ska 20 years ago, we're danced to today with the fast-moving title track, then the rocksteady paced opening and full-speed finish *Dog Eat Dog.* Not enough covers yet? *Sweet Home Town Jamaica* continues the flight. The band promises their members and music are stronger than ever and I can't prove them wrong. If you're on-line, they promise exclusive MP3 files at www.toasters.org so get to clicking.

COMPILATION

Horseshoes and Bar-B-Ques (11345 Records, Box 4948, Berkeley CA 94704 www.11345.com) Much of this grouping is distorted guitar rock. I keep going back to *Beer And Perfume* by the Fitsners. "I drive a Pinto and I have an overbite, but you love to hold my hand. I love my hangover just like I love you." This is hilarious and astounding, all at the same time. Other intriguing entries are by The Atlas Lickers, and *Sex w/Strangers* comes from the Suicide Doors. Technically, good dynamic range on all tracks. Musically, there are no dull moments, I can assure you.

SGR

FANZINE

Under The Volcano #68 ($2.95 at newsstands, PO Box 236, Nesconset NY 11767 www.underthevolcano.net) I need no other encouragement to read this issue than the Q&A with Jello Biafra. This magazine, billing itself as "still living under a punk rock," introduces Biafra as an artist with "his body of work." I like that. Biafra reminds us that not all his outlets of expression have done well, such as his No WTO Combo, "Although I think it outsold that crappy Dead Kennedys live album." There's also welcome coverage of New Jersey's Prevent Falls, which we are told is "breaking down the barriers between punk, emo and hardcore," plus reviews in an excellent newsprint, full-size effort.

Why Don't You Call?

Send questions, suggestions, records, zines, MP3s, or whatever you have on whatever media you have by e-mail to Chuckx@ev1.net or regular mail to Chuck Wharton, 11922 Westheimer PMB 368, Houston TX 77077.

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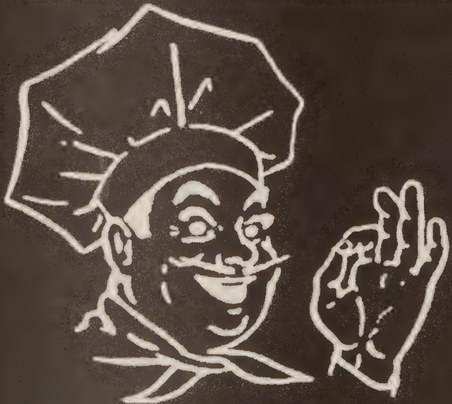

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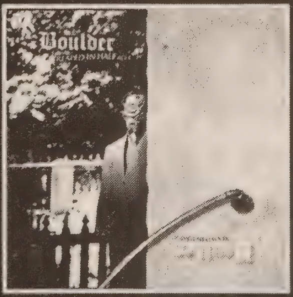


BOULDER
Reaped in Half Act I and II
CD/LP (TP-040)

Boulder's raging follow-up to 2000's *Ravage and Savage*. "Filthy heavy rock'n'roll with a drunken scumbag for a vocalist. (KKKK)" –Kerrang!

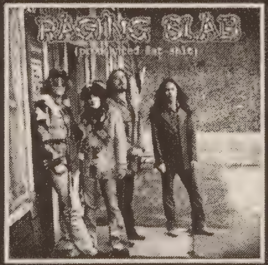
Bad Wizard
Sophisticated Mouth

BAD WIZARD
Sophisticated Mouth
CD/LP (TP-045)

The follow-up to 2000's *Free & Easy*. New York's loud rockers do it deeper this time. On tour all the time. Check the website for dates. In stores 10/29.

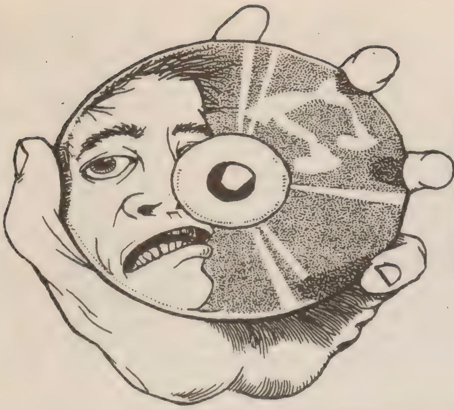
BLACK NASA
CD/LP (TP-044)

From the ashes of The Atomic Bitchwax, Black Nasa's debut CD/LP. Coming in September.


RAGING SLAB
(pronounced Eat Shit)

RAGING SLAB
Pronounced Eat Shit
CD/LP (TP-043)

The masters of boogie return with their 7th studio album. Follow up to 2001's *The Dealer*. Coming in September.



Record Reviews

7 MINDS - *Helps Me Remember* (Over the WOL Records PO Box 104 Mantoloking, NJ 08738) What I like most about 7 Minds new release is, they take chances. Which means they're either going to win big or fall flat on their face. They can play it straight, creating solid mainstream alt. rock ("Heads Up," or "Bender"), techno/trip-hop ("Dawn"), or funk it up with horns ("Flying Blind," "Light Years"). The end result being a fusion of sounds that works on many levels. 7 Minds are not a gimmick. This is their third album, and if you're even remotely familiar with the bands music, you'll see an impressive progression. It's great to see a band take chances. This album definitely wins big time! - Phil Rainone

34 SATELLITE – *Stop* (Hideaway Records) Among certain circles, 34 Satellite are considered "the next big thing" in the alt-country world, the band's mix of jangling guitars and slight (very slight) country twang creating excitement among many people (critics included) who should know better. Certainly, the band members have impressive credentials – guitarist Marc Smith is formerly of Snatches of Pink, drummer Mark Boquist helped found Screaming Trees and bassist Mike Santoro comes from alt-country darlings Whiskeytown. 34 Satellite frontman Marc Benning is hailed as a "songwriting genius" by many but I'm sorry, the Reverend's jaded old ears just don't hear it. The band's latest, *Stop*, isn't the snoozefest the Reverend thought it to be upon first listen, but subsequent spins have done little to convince this humble scribe of the band's impending deification. Benning is a fair-to-middlin' word wrangler, his songs lacking the character of Brent Best's literary material for Slobberbone or the Bottle Rockets' Brian Henneman and his down-to-earth missives from the Midwest. The band crashes and bashes with the best of them, often drowning Benning's fey vocals in a mix overwhelmed by clashing instrumentation and the material suffers from too much sonic similarity between tracks. The result isn't as offensive as, say, Justin Timberlake's upcoming solo album is sure to be, but neither is it distinctive enough to recommend beyond initial curiosity. 34 Satellite are a band worth keeping an eye on, but the three Marc/Marks and a Mike should listen to a few old Roger McGuinn and Gram Parsons discs and get back to us. – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

40 BELOW SUMMER - *Invitation to the Dance* (London) The first song "We The People" is an aggressive, metallic anthem, a wake up call that gets your attention from the get- go. Like their live show, the music is neither force-fed or self indulging. As the band's name implies, they reflect opposites, which is evident also in their music. Songs range from brutal & heavy (Rope, Step Into the Sideshow), to beautifully expressive (Wither Away, Drown). The music is broader and bolder than most of their contemporaries, and takes you on a musical journey you soon won't forget! At their live show they emphatically invite you to dance (mosh & surf), as the title implies. It's hard not to react to 40 Below Summer's music and stage presence. - Phil Rainone

50 TONS OF BLACK TERROR – *Unt* (Spacebaby Records, 1939 N. Kenmore Ave. #104, Los Angeles, CA 90027) For some reason, unknown to me, these four neurotic blooze bashers from under the Union Jack go by the moniker "Penthouse" elsewhere on the globe. Whoever they claim to be to you, there's no denying that they deliver but one thing: overblown raunchy aggression and turmoil—much like the Mississippi delta swimming in a cesspool of bad lysergic. Now let's harken back to Mule and all those Touch and Go Records' psycho-punks from the '80's that fingered that subconscious rush of tainted adrenaline lewdness. You know the ones, those who talked about things you really didn't want to hear while playing off center just enough to make your girlfriend start bargaining. 50 Tons hit the same vein with quite a vengeance. Twelve tracks here that go straight from ballistic blues schizophrenia to sorrowful blues, uh, well. . . schizophrenia. Not really for the uninitiated. – Greg Matherly

98 MUTE – *After The Fall* (Epitaph) Turning 98 Mute's sound into words is like trying to lick a shadow poised for a moment on your arm. You move to taste it, watch it fall to the floor beside your duct-taped sneakers, and it never does touch you, really. A shadow is just this kind of one-dimensional fragment, a soundless shading or variation, a covering that doesn't penetrate. I guess it's the non-detailed repetition of an object, a silhouette, a multiple without a soul; which is to say, in context and in the light of Epitaph's rather homogenous output, you can skip this record because you've heard it already in the guise of something else some time ago, and that too was but a weightless shadow of a moment or era or second before it, ad infinitum. –Brandon Stosuy

ADVANCED PLANTS – *The Yesterday Button* (info@advancedplants.net) A self-description of the craft pursued by these two southern New Englanders runs, "thick beats and dubby bass lines." I can't agree with them more. It's impressing to note the live drum kit and minimal reliance on a particular theme. These seven tracks, although undeniably elementary in composition, find a rhythmic niche and release it before it becomes the often-heard *electronica ad nauseam*. Other than that, it's sort of a droll and catatonic venture, bordering on the boring. These guys seem to work well together, but it sounds at times like they should explore different avenues of songwriting and study up on the concept of dynamics. –Greg Matherly

ALIEN CRIME SYNDICATE - *XL From Coast To Coast* (V2music.com) Ex Meices front guy/hook meister Joe Reinke and his ACS are at it again with their slicked out catchy Replacements meets The Rentals power pop on *XL From Coast To Coast*. Much like ACS's last release 2000's *From The Word Go* Reinke writes super catchy keyboard laiden pop tunes with big hooks and anthemic choruses, and an injection of 70's teen rock spirit ala Cheap Trick. If you're tired of gettin' emo and lookin' to chomp on some sweet power pop hooks then *XL From Coast To Coast* is sure to give you that much needed sugar rush. - Rick K.

ALLISTER - *Dead Ends and Girlfriends* (Drive Thru Records) One of the more animated, fun bands that rocked the Asbury Surf & Skate Fest this year! They played in the Paramount Theatre to an enthusiastic crowd, which wasn't as easy as it sounds (the theatre is in great shape, so moshing etc. wasn't allowed, and mostly everyone had to sit. The CD reflects Allister's pure alt/pop sound. "Jimmy's Dreamgirl," "Jacob," and "It's Just Me," are good examples of what rocks this disc (and their live show), with the guitars, drums and vocals whipping the music into a frenzy. Their covers of "Fraggle Rawk," & "I Want it That Way" (Backstreet Boys) become cool rock anthems. On the latter song, Allister takes a whimpy, whiney pop tune, and turn it into an uncompromising rocker. - Phil Rainone

ANGER OF THE LAMB – *Extrovert* (PO Box 96, Bogota, NJ, 07603) – I was totally fooled by the creepy cover art/layout and expected yet another bad metalcore band trying to sound like the next Converge. Well, for once, I would have preferred the Converge rip-off. Anger of the Lamb are a really fucking lame heavy industrial band, with their sequencers programmed to "please give us a radio hit." This stuff is tolerable when done by folks with talent, like Trent Reznor or the Atari Teenage Riot kids, but when some cranky-sounding dude takes his worst diary entries and hits the pre-programmed industrial button on his computerized keyboard, the results are painful and embarrassing. When the just plain nasty "Wish You Away" turns into an impromptu version of "Summer Lovin'," bile from even the strongest stomachs will start to rise. I hope they didn't quit their day jobs. – Jason Schreurs

AQUILA – *Say Yeah* (Starlight, starlight@aquilanova.com, aquilanova.com) When I was in 8th grade my sister's boyfriend dumped her the day before an important Bon Jovi concert and I was forced to accompany her to the event. This was traumatic for a young hardcore kid, but now at least I know of what I speak: taken as a whole, Aquila's *Say Yeah* evokes a pale-orange Bon Jovi encore, tripped lighters ringing with sounds of steel horses, the lapping hiss of the NJ shore. And when the lighters stop (because they do run out after a time, like our lesser habits), the eyes of the onlookers sting with salt and hairspray, chaffed legs hot and lost beneath black acid-washed jeans. As the house lights go back up, you see that the guy next to you is wrinkled, the once-transcendent girl behind you is drunk on one beer, that people are forever getting closer to death despite their costumes. That night of Bon Jovi in Philadelphia, I saw sad metalheads wandering into the night, kind of outmoded already, clowns without a circus. I felt their loss, the fact that they were lost at all; honestly, though, I can't condone harping on such lack forever, because, really, you could trim your hair, realize that beauty is evanescent, develop new and more complex tastes, take a trip, move on. -Brandon Stosuy

ARMSTRONG - *Dick, The Lion Hearted* (Owned & Operated, oandorecords.com) Fittingly Bill Stevenson and the rest of the All camp are releasing the very style of power pop punk they helped forge during the 80's and 90's on their own label Owned & Operated. The trio known as Armstrong featuring ex Hagfish members are following in the meat and potatoes stripped down style of their label heads. The difference between All and these guys is that although at times All could go off a little bit on their burly almost jazzy time signatures there were always hooks to be found, maybe not in every song but their records always had at least a few really strong cuts that stuck in your head for days. Armstrong's problem is that their all about being tight and to the point but somewhere along the line forgot to slip in the hooks which of course is what makes this style when done right appealing. Much like Jersey boys Shades Apart this trio somehow manages to create pop punk and leave out the most important ingredient. –Rick K.

AS FRIENDS RUST - *A Young Trophy band In The Parlance Of Our Times* EP (Equal Vision Records, PO Box 14, Hudson, NY 12634) While certainly not at all on par with the self- titled Doghouse EP that was this band's pinnacle, or earlier screamier inclinations, this 5-song EP from Florida's As Friends Rust is quite a bit better than the wholly uneven, overly slick, radio rock-slanted full-length catastrophe that tarnished this band's good name. Lyrically clever as always, the musical counterpart to the scenewide condemnations, criticisms of blind patriotism, and tales of addiction is mostly bearable, and at certain points above par. The layered razor licks of the opening "More Than Just Music, It's A Hairstyle", and the opening rhythmic verbal trouncing of "The Most Americanest," are memorable enough, though the absolutely awful low crooning that tragically surfaces on the latter song, and on the especially grating ballad "Up And Went" serve as flat, syrupy slick reminders of dismal past failures. The final song here, "Where The Wild Things Were", is by far the strongest with some proficient jagged, echoing musical interplay, intricate bass rumbling, and stalwart melody worthy, at times, of comparison to earlier work and better days in this band's spotty legacy. A marked improvement, though by no means a full recovery. – Mike Ramek

ASH - *Free All Angels* (Kinetic) A shame it took a year or so for this album to get released in America as Ash is one of the only Top-40 Britpop bands that are great. There may not be a "Girl From Mars" or "Goldfinger" on here, but the songs are still very catchy and noisy. Unfortunately, not-so-perfect bonus tracks and overproduction by way of strings and keyboards plague "Free All Angels" from being a start-to-finish listen. -Darren Paltrowitz

THE ATARIS - *Anywhere But Here* (Kung Fu Records) The Ataris new release Anywhere But Here, is a little more aggressive than their last release, which featured the smash hit Teenage Riot. Fueled by the Punk DIY ethic, the songs strike out at boredom (Are We There Yet?), love (Clara), and the state of music (Four Chord Wonder, Nerd Rock). Just last year they were a happy surprise on the Asbury Park leg of the Vans Warped Tour. My daughter Melissa was there, and said she thought "They were good."- Believe me, that's high praise from her! Anywhere But Here has 21 songs, they all rock, period! - Phil Rainone

ATREYU - *Suicide Notes and Butterfly Kisses* (Victory Records) Although Victory Records has added some pop/punk bands (Snow Dogs, Student Rick), to their roster, they've definitely not gone soft. Atreyu are like a musical kick in the head. Destructive vocals along with a hard, melodic rhythm section that set off bone-crushing riffs, set Atreyu apart. Put away your Green Day & Blink cd's, it's time for a change. - Phil Rainone

AUDIO EXPLORATIONS – *ActionReaction* (Eskimo Kiss Records, PO Box 3603, Wilmington, NC 28406) Only two good things have come out of Jacksonville, FL. The latest is the dynamic duo of Steven Haley and James Tritten, a.k.a. Audio Explorations. Since 1996, these guys have been perfecting an ambient pop thrum that comes off as full and intelligent, as well as simple and quite complacent. Live, for the most part, it's tape loops and the programmed Korg that round out the real time guitar and drums. For this, their second full-length studio album, they pile layer upon layer of tracks to achieve a choral character that defies their numbers. Like clouds, memories, and other fruity similes, these guys can either meld into the background or go toe-to-toe with the mood of the hour. Catch their audio/visual gigs if they make it to your town on their first nation-wide tour. Oh, and the other good thing to come out of Jacksonville happened in St. Vincent's hospital back in the '70's, when rock criticism was but a pup. –Greg Matherly

BABY DAYLINER – *High Heart And Low Estate* (www.babydayliner.com) Ethan Marunas is Baby Dayliner, a lean, lanky white boy with a beatbox and big stack of rhymes. With his near monotone delivery, the fey insouciance of Rufus Wainwright, and the elegant melodicism of the Pet Shop Boys. Baby Dayliner is hip hop for people who'd rather read *The New Yorker* than *Vibe*, who sip Tanqueray and soda rather than Mad Dog 20/20, and who think Depeche Mode was really a lot hotter than everyone always said. Eminem wouldn't get it. P.M. Dawn might. And somewhere, Van Dyke Parks is smiling. Jim Testa

BARRY & THE PENETRATORS - *Beaver Country* (www.barryandthe penetrators.com) As a last minute addition to the Asbury Surf & Skate Fest, these guys opened the main stage with a lot of adrenaline flowing. Cool reggae roots/rock ("I'll Try," & ""Rub-A-Dub"), and a few obvious songs about sex ("SKin Flute," the title track, etc), were fun and upbeat! On the CD (and their show), they create some good vibes. They don't take themselves too seriously, and that type of attitude is going to give them longevity! - Phil Rainone

THE BEATSTEAKS - *Living Targets* (Epitaph) The Beatsteaks play melodic, punk rock anthems ("Not Ready to Rock," "Summer,") that reek of 60's garage rock. Thanks to the over the top vocals of Arnim, and backing vocals by Peter and Bernd (the band is from Germany), the band balances rough harmonies with a bouncy rhythm section (Torsten -bass, and Thomas -drums). The band explodes around brilliant, abrasive, punk masterpieces like "Let Me In" and "Mirrored." This is not a run of the mill punk rock band. They're genuine, tough, and have something to say! -Phil Rainone

BECK - *Sea Change* (DGC/Geffen) Irony is dead, and so is whatever once made Beck Hanson interesting. This is fine if you're looking for a sad, slow-tempo'd country album, but a lot of people will run out and buy this and wonder how they came home with the new Glen Campbell CD. – Jim Testa

THE BERLIN PROJECT - "the/transition/radio/EP" (Orange Peal Records, POB 15207, Fremont, CA 94539) One of the last bands to play on Sunday night of the 3 day Surf & Skate Fest (they brought a weary but energetic crowd to life with their lively set). This 5 song Ep is upbeat and full of catchy riffs. The band includes keyboards & moog, courtesy of Aaron Mediate. He gives the band's punk/new wave lullabies more depth and pop, (especially on "Crashing Down" & "Runaway"). Their live show is colorful, and their stage presence gives the songs a fresh feel. Here, they present the continuing story of alt/pop suburban life. -- Phil Rainone

BLEEDING THROUGH - *Portrait Of The Goddess* (Indecision Records, PO Box 5781, Huntington Beach, CA 92615) For all the absolutely abysmal Swede metal/pseudo black metal-influenced clones clogging the arteries of the modern hardcore scene, it takes one band doing it right to set the record straight. Disillusionment with the greater collective of mediocre outfits aside, Bleeding Through's full length, entitled "Portrait Of The Goddess" is a proficient hessian thriller. A monumental, moody ambience envelopes the soundscape here. This twisted amalgam of searing melodic interplay, fierce, frenetic rhythms, and thick, haunting piano/organ work complements the band's dark orchestral vision wonderfully. Maiden-esque dual licks, and a steady, tight progression of caustic thrash-infused Scandinavian epic metal riffage meld with a marked Systems Overload-era Integrity gravel throated vocal delivery, with memorable results. The key to this outfit's aural brilliance is their utilization of a rigorously structured scheme of instrumentation that nevertheless refuses to succumb to numbing technical overkill, with showmanship and prowess seldom superceding the intrinsic melodic drive and anthemic wallop of the music. While the influences are predictably recognizable, and the oft-replicated format is a bit redundant at this point, Bleeding Through add a lissome feel to this style that is a marked improvement over the droves of similar outfits surfacing as of late. Enthusiasts of the core-suffixed metal genre will not be disappointed. - Mike Ramek

Berlin Project **Photo by Lucy Rayberg**

BLOOD RED - *Hostage* (Initial Records PO BOX 17131 Louisville, Kentucky 40217) The gifted, rich writing of Tom Corrigan, one time vocalist of the now defunct Long Island hardcore outfit Silent Majority, pervades the lyrical output of his new endeavor entitled Blood Red. As before, merciless, harrowing snapshots of suburban life and familial disarray are poignantly captured with poetic zest. The musical counterpart to these excursions into loneliness and insecurity marks a distinct deviation from the epic, sprawling exercises in tonal intricacy that Silent Majority became capable of at their peak. A decidedly darker, bleaker, thinner sound permeates the output here. Gone are the thick, massive anthems of the SM-era, replaced here by sparse, downtrodden arrangements that recall a blend of early '80s U2/Replacements-era rock inclinations, and a token tinge of straightforward hardcore punk, as well. Shards of broken home poetics (the opening "Peeping Tom"), portraits of hypocrisy (Conscience Calling), and recollections of suburban suffering ("Suburbia") surface here in good form. The uniformly sorrowful, often acoustic-laced sound here is largely executed with considerable skill, though at sluggish, overly sappy intervals it drags a bit. Those looking for a resurrection of all that was Silent Majority will be in for a bit of a shock, though this is by no means a bad thing. Though not nearly as well rounded as the aforementioned, there is much promise embedded in these dirge-esque laments, and the future will likely yield good things to come from this formative outfit. –Mike Ramek

BLOODLET - *Three Humid Nights in the Cypress Trees* (Victory Records) Along with labelmates Atreyu, Bloodlet plays brutal, structured music! Produced by Steve Alibini, the band's music is loud, hard, and contains brutal lyrics. they call their style "evil Metalcore." High volume vocals, over dense, mind-bending manic music.- Phil Rainone

BRAND NEW SIN (Now Or Never Records) When Guns-n-Roses burst onto the scene in 1987, the music industry was shaken to their core. Here was a band that was dirty, grimy, sang about getting drunk, and yet, they had a tender side. While Axl Rose has us in the palm of his hand, as we await the release of Chinese Democracy, you may be asking yourself, "Why don't we say, "Screw Axl because there's a new band that kicks their ass." That band is Brand New Sin and if everyone that is salivating because G-n-R is finally going to release a CD (even though there's no Slash) would pick up a copy of the debut from Brand New Sin . . . let's just say it'd be a wonderful world. I can't stop listening to this release. The CD kicks off with the same kind of powerful anthem that made "Welcome to the Jungle" such a monster of a song. There's the gritty vocal performance, the powerful drumming (which always was G-n-R's weakest instrument,) and interesting guitar riffs. This is the record of 2002. This is ballsy, courageous, and i my Top 5 picks for 2002. - Paul Hanson

BRATMOBILE - *Girls Get Busy* (Lookout!) The Brats are back! Yes sir, one of the original bands to have to bear the hideous moniker of "riot grrrl" , Bratmobile return to rock for fun and fairness. Always putting humor and irony before politics, Bratmobile deliver thirteen cuts like "Shop For America", "Idiot Lover" and "Are You A lady?", that sound like what would happen if Shonen Knife played postpunk instead of pop-punk. Give *Girls Get Busy* to your kid sister instead of the new Britney Spears album and start her off right. And why you're at it, buy one for yourself. - Oliver Lyons

BREATHE IN - *From This Day On* (Bridge Nine Records) Breathe In's release seems like a band that is just dipping its collective toe in the deep end. Track one is just starting to get interesting when the song begins to fade. Track two starts out promising with a heart-felt vocal performance from Brett, but the lack of an original riff ruins the song. By track 3, you're wishing this was over, but you have a few more tracks to go. It seems like this band would be better off writing "songs" that develop their ideas. I know punk bands, which this band seems to be wanting to be classified as (what other genre excuses a 22 minute release) are known for short powerful bursts. This band just doesn't have the collective uniqueness to stand above the crowd. I found this painful to listen to. - Paul Hanson

BRIGHT CALM BLUE - *Asymmetry Set* (Divot Records, P.O. BOX 14061, Chicago, IL 60614) Rhythmic, sharp, minimal 'screamo' hardcore, similar in form to such Lovvit Records-era incarnations as Sleepytime Trio, and newer bands like The Red Scare. The start-and-stop blasts of searing riff tumult and interspersed melody, fronted by the perfunctory shrill unintelligible shrieks, and muddled, muttered exclamations of yore bear a striking, unmistakable resemblance to bands of the Shotmaker camp, yet Bright Calm Blue ultimately fail to elicit the frenzied musical virtuosity, impassioned, intricate songwriting, and unpredictable energy that the aforementioned progenitors of this style were known for, and exhibited with much aplomb once upon a time. Ultimately comprised of a flat amalgam of early '90s style flair, with little substance to validate the stripped down noise excursions the listener must endure, this band seems to ultimately fail at accomplishing anything remotely vital or exciting here (let alone original). A diluted tribute to a bygone era. – Mike Ramek

BRIGHT EYES – "There Is No Beginning to the Story" EP (Saddle Creek, PO Box 8554, Omaha, NE 68108-0554, www.saddle-creek.com) Intensely passionate indie rock music, with lush arrangements of an almost orchestral-like quality. Included are some non-traditional instruments, like in "Messenger Bird's Song," which includes quiet punctuations from fiddle and banjo (though it's not a country tune) and from a vibraphone, as well. "Loose Leaves" is a bouncy, sparkly track with a lo-fi psychedelic feel to it that also includes some non-traditional instruments such as trombone. There is a really unique sound to this disc, which is a rare thing in this day and age. Good stuff. - Paul Silver

BRIGHT EYES – *Lifted Or The Story Is In The Soil, Keep Your Ears To The Ground* (Saddle Creek) Oh my god, what a pantload. The whole alternative press (as well as the magazine named after it) should be ashamed of themselves for whatever payola they've taken to create such a buzz. The new Dylan? Hardly! More like the new Chris Burke, the retarded child actor from TV's *Life Goes On*, whose solo album from the 80's is ten times more coherent, tight, and competent as this pretentiously-titled opus. Conor Oberst, who essentially is Bright Eyes, shows himself here as a spoiled little shit who has somehow up to now avoided resolving even the most common issues of adolescence, and he thinks we want to hear about it. Well, fuck you, Conor, you self-pitying yet self-important little twerp. Really sad people don't have agents. – Johnny Puke

THE BUSINESS - *Hell 2 Pay* (TKO Records) Only three songs on this CD EP- but like most everything the Business does – they're great. This seems to be their tribute to living in a ghetto and the violence that surrounds that. 'Hell 2 Pay also happens to be a new soon to be released film. This ends on a lighter note with a great cover of Eddie & the Hot Rod's 1977 classic "Do Anything You Wanna Do" . Ok – so when is the full lengther coming out? – Tom Brebric

CADILLAC BLINDSIDE – *These Liquid Lungs* (Fueled By Ramen Records, PO Box 12563, Gainesville FL 32604) They've been compared to pop-punk outfits like Sum-41 or the Drive-Thru Records stable but Cadillac Blindside, who have toured with the likes of Less Than Jake, the Weakerthans and Alkaline Trio, approach punk rock from a different perspective than those chart-toppers. Sure, there are plenty of pop hooks to be found on *These Liquid Lungs*, but the album offers much more for those willing to listen between the grooves. With their second full-length album, the Minneapolis quartet has put together an ultra-cool collection of modern love songs that explores the length and breadth of the obsessions of romance, supported by three chords and the bratty vocals of Jimmy Russell and Zachary Zrust. "Straightjacket Weather" is an insightful glimpse into the insanity of love while "Save Your Breath" is a love letter to one left behind. Russell and Zrust are competent guitarslingers, but drummer Rebecca Hanten and bassist Trenton Raygor are the band's backbone, providing a strong signature rhythm to the material. *These Liquid Lungs* is an impressive work, a solid effort that is not diminished by the band's subsequent break-up after the album's release. (www.cadillacblindside.com) – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

CAESURA – *More Specific, Less Pacific* (54°40' or Fight! PO Box 1601, Acme, MI 49610-1601, fiftyfourfortyorfight.com) There was this time, during a simpler era, when I walked a bunch of blocks in a fairly massive snowstorm to see the original line-up of Unsane play a sort-of-unannounced (i.e.: badly promoted) show at The Court Tavern. There were five people in attendance, lots of excuses for the low attendance, many snow puddles on the floor beside and around our feet. As I watched Unsane and their broken equipment, I kept thinking about how duct tape can cover so much decay. Unsane had a record with an exploded head guy on the cover. That came to me as I zoned out, and I started wondering if you could fix his head with duct tape, maybe save his life if the impact of the explosion didn't kill him initially. I figured it actually could be possible. *More Specific, Less Pacific* is a stupidly named record filled with awful punning song titles (i.e.: "Assassin Assassin," "The Tunnel At The End of the Light," etc.) and fairly generic balls-out noise rock, but I like it vaguely because the totally low production values not only kick the digital age in the nuts, they remind me also of that snowed-in night, and just how loud and extreme those three folks in Unsane were, how loud and intense music can get when it emerges from broken things. -Brandon Stosuy

CAMBER - *Wake Up and Be Happy* (Deep Elm Records, PO Box 36939, Charlotte, NC 28236) This breaks my heart to write. I have loved nearly every piece of product released by Deep Elm, but this simply falls flatn. Camber intends to acknowledge hopelessness and other painful emotions and transform them into passionate, interpersonal musical explorations. Sadly, the record never emerges from its self-inflicted doldrums, the worst possible of all emo problems. Only briefly on "Short Sleeves" and "Expat" does the band display any sense of energy or force. All too often, the music seems premeditated and passe, alternating between quiet, sensitive playing and more rambunctious guitar squall. Vocalist Barry Lott seems to be stretching his range on too many efforts, particularly "Devil You Know" and the title track, as if he is searching for complex emotional plain that simply is not there. I found myself bored while listening to this, and Camber would have a hard time waking anyone up with this record. - Rich Quinln

THE CAN UTILITY - *Afternoon Shave* (canutility.virtualave.net) These three Richmond Virginia young'uns rock out most of the time in the standard post -hardcore indie fashion with sparse haunting guitar flange that speeds up then gets soft and pretty. There certainly is some personality behind these somewhat generic tunes and with time maybe it'll come out. - RIck K.

CATTLE DECAPITATION - *To Serve Man* (Metal Blade). Thirteen tracks of pure gore/grind heaven. I'm usually not into this kinda metal, but I like the music. Usually with gore bands, not much effort is put into the writing or the production of the music, but this album changes all that. The guitars are very well-defined, heavy, and the guitarist plays very intense licks. Another reason why this album can set itself apart from others of this genre is the drums. The beats are always changing, and the songs aren't too long, so you never loose interest in the songs. All in all, I think it's a good album. – Phil Pinto

CAVESLUTS - *Cynthia's Libido* (www.cavesluts.com) Cavesluts are a band from China, transplanted to the southeastern USA. They have a unique sound, rooted in indie rock tradition, yet quite different. The first two songs alternate between light, airy stuff, quirky, carnival-like stuff, and then edgy, dark music. The third cut is full-on grungey indie-rock. Tracks use unconventional instrumentation, such as what sounds like harp, synth, etc. to good effect. "No Ideas" is probably the stand-out track of the disc. It's very 80s garage, and probably the song with the most intensity on the whole disc. Overall a very diverse disc that is quite listenable, yet doesn't ever really get very passionate. The whole thing is a bit too laid back, too emotionless, with the exception of "No Ideas." - Paul Silver

CHAMPION - *Count Our Numbers EP* (Bridge Nine Records, PO Box 990052, Boston, MA 02199-0052) As a follow up to their solid demo and strong EP on Phyte Records, Northwest sXe rumblers Champion offer a new 6-song EP that surpasses previous efforts in terms of both its explosive sound and its polished production work. With very little stylistic deviation from earlier endeavors, Count Our Numbers" is an accomplished collection of taut, painstakingly structured and layered '88-style hardcore numbers with formidable melodic underpinnings, and a penchant for lyrical introspection. Forceful, jaunting, and explosive, this group tackles the oft-attempted build/breakdown/shout-along laden blasts of hardcore with unique and formidable force. Through a fairly steady string of lineup shifts, vocalist Jim Hesketh and guitarist Chris Williams have kept their vision afloat, and their latest display of regimented, speed shifting mayhem is an excellent testament to the perseverance of spirited straight edge pandemonium. - Mike Ramek

CHUMBAWUMBA – *Readymades* (Universal) Those looking for the more anarchic music of Chumbawumba's past or another annoying sports-rock hit like "Tubthumping" will be sadly disappointed. *Readymades* is essentially 13 songs of chill-out house music, with an emphasis on nautical themes and primarily female vocals. Almost all the instrumentation is electronic, the beats mid-tempo and soothing, and there's not a rock n roll guitar to be found. While the lyrics here are generally vague, the liner notes direct one to their socio-political significance. Chumbawumba are never going to reclaim their underground hip cache, but at least they're still unpredictable and uncalculating; there isn't a "hit" anywhere to be found here. They've been knocked down, will they get up again? – Johnny Puke

TOM CLARK AND THE HIGH ACTION BOYS - *Cross-Eyed and Bow-Legged* (Blacksmith Records, 57 Flatbush Ave. Extension, Suite 1, Brooklyn, NY 11201) It's country music! It's rock and roll! It's two musical styles in one! If'n y'all like country and you like rock, then this is the album for you. This blends traditional country sounds, some modern Nashville influence, and a dose of rock and roll. It's pretty well done, for those of you who dig this stuff. I certainly isn't the kind of thing I would listen to on a regular basis, or even once in awhile. - Paul Silver

CHRISTIANSEN – *Forensics Brothers and Sisters!* (Revelation Records, PO Box 5232, Huntington Beach, CA, 92615-5232) Some people can hardly stand the sight of their roommates, never mind create enthralling music with them. Christiansen are four Louisville, KY hardcore scene veterans that all live and practice under the same roof, with interesting results. The comfort is felt in the non-rushed sound of these six songs; it's easy to tell a lot of time and thought went into them. The bass lines and pounding intros immediately spring Fugazi to mind, but most of these songs end up in the shifty, sneaky realm of At the Drive In, something that begins to wear on the nerves after a few tracks. The whiny vocals end up bringing the festivities down a notch, as do the overly ambitious attempts to fit as many different ideas into one song as possible (see the 10-minute plus closing track). When Christiansen keep it relatively simple, as in "Transistorized Landscapes," it's a pleasant listen, as good as any of the current emo bands. – Jason Schreurs

COCO - *The COCO Sound* (K Records, Box 7154, Olympia, WA 98507,) This takes minimalism to the extreme, with drums, bass, and vocals only on most of the tracks, though there's some keyboards on a couple of the tracks. Musically, this reminds me, though, of Devo-ish new wave stuff without all the electronics. Or maybe spartan B-52s, though on Prozac and not quite as manic. That might have to do with the male and female vocalists taking turns going back and forth. It's a pretty unique sound, and an intriguing one, to a point. Thankfully, COCO knows where the line is between pleasure and pain, and keeps us well on the pleasure side. - Paul Silver

THE CODE *Alert Aware Involved* (AF Records, PO Box 71266, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, a-frecords.com) Pittsburgh-based crumbling city punk with a sort of Operation Ivy ska, really more like The Bouncing Souls or Rancid. "Riot" offers two-part shouts and crowded chants to pump your fist to, even if the means to the ends is obvious. "Realization and Reconciliation" features a catchy shift midway through - two chanting voices and a higher held note in the back - shit that makes you riot in the streets. There isn't distinguished songwriting, but the overall agglomeration of lyrical images is interesting, sort of like Bruce Springsteen with Liberty Spikes: urban landscapes, dusted sprawl, torn photographs, anonymous and fleshed-out characters, dead friends, the idiosyncrasies of the street, and the collective images of a working class rust belt punk rock community. -Brandon Stosuy

COLD MEMORY - *Damage / No Damage* (Rev Up Records, PO Box 1432, Melville, NY 44747, www.revuprecords.com). Fairly uninspired rock music that sounds like many of the commercial "alternative" bands out there today. There are a few high points, such as "The Echoing Call," which shifts back and forth like a song suffering from multiple personality syndrome, but, unfortunately, these are few and far between. - Paul Silver

THE COLOR RED - *Clear* (RCA/BMG) -- It's pretty bad when The Color Red's claim to fame is that singer and bassist Jon and Marc Zamora have a younger brother who plays in (wait for it) Alien Ant Farm. It's surprising they let that little public relations nightmare out of the bag, because *Clear* ain't half-bad. A heavy Deftones influence is apparent the moment the muted chords of "The Other One" switch to the melodic power groove that sounds so familiar. Jon Zamora even tries his best Chino impersonation, but to little avail. Don't expect much deviation from the melodic nu-metal formula --- stop, start, quiet, crunch, repeat, repeat, repeat. "Sore Throat" is the band's stab at some radio play, and surely they'll get it, since it sounds identical to anything else heard on those so-called "modern rock" stations. Hey, look at the bright side, at least it doesn't sound like Alien Art Farm. Jason Schreurs

CORDALENE - *Stumble and Fal* (Manic Pop Thrill Reords, 501 S. 9th St., Philadelphia, PA 19147) This is a really different sound, mixing jangly indie-pop with the wispy sounds of late 60s pop (think "California Dreamin'" from the Mamas and Papas) and a small dose of alternative country sounds. It's light, pleasant, and, well, jangly stuff. Included is a nice cover of Lou Reed's "Who Loves the Sun." NIce stuff. - Paul Silver

DAG NASTY *Minority of One* (Revelation Records, PO Box 5232, Huntington Beach CA 92615-5232) - Dag Nasty fans who felt burned by 1992's *Four On The Floor* and kept their hopes alive for the past 10 years will be flabbergasted by how good this new reunion record is. What a fucking rush to hear all four original members (Dave Smalley, Brian Baker, Roger Marbury and Colin Sears) back in the fine form that made 1986's *Can I Say* one of the best ever emo-punk records. *Minority of One* is almost a tribute to *Can I Say*, with a similar track order and pacing as the original classic. Elements of Smalley and Baker's other bands do sneak in on occasion, such as some Bad Religion guitar solos from Baker and a Down By Law singing style from Smalley, but that's more a result of these two changing their styles with experience and playing with different bandmates. Marbury and Sears are as tight as ever, and haven't sounded this good since their days in Alloy with Vic Biondi. Tracks like "Bottle This," "Incinerate, " and "Throwing Darts" are up there with any song Dag Nasty wrote in their heyday. Actually, most of this record matches or exceeds the seminal *Can I Say* songs --seriously. When the bombastic title track rattles off in rapid-fire riffery, it's damn beautiful. - Jason Schreurs

THE DAMN PERSONALS - *Standing Still in the USA* (Initech, 1312 Boylston Street Rear, Boston, MA 02215) The hellishly crazed and caterwauling opening song "Fucking in NYC" jumpstarts things with electrifying verve, firmly establishing the thrilling sense of wild-assed abandon which gloriously permeates every last ragged, raucous, manically rolicking note on this shit-hot ferocious indie rock album. This Boston quartet rock it up somethin' sweet. with clear-the-air arresting vocals riding roughshod over a fiercely roiling sonic juggernaut of snarly blitzkrieg guitar tiffs, jackhammer drum beats, and supremely snaky serpentine bass lines. "Standing Still in the USA" slithers along with tightly coiled menace, "Models + Airliners" grinds away to a sumptuous syncopated beat, "Sleeping on the Floors, UTD" sneers and rumbles with rousing aplomb, and "Saturday" captures the rowdiness of the weekend with bang-up exhilarating accuracy. This is rock music distilled down to its most excitingly basic and bare essentials: Raw, hard-stompin', and with plenty of proudly defiant attitude to burn, *Standing Still in the USA* seriously cooks on primo unleaded gas. -- Joe Wawyrzniak

DE LA HOYA - *Wipe the Slate Clean... Now Let 's Begin EP* (BD Records, PO Box 860, New York, NY, 10268-0860) A four-song EP of heartfelt melodic emo punk, similar to d.b.s. and I Farm. The mix of sung and screamy melodies and bouncy, flirtatious guitar work is endearing as hell, and gives the impression this band is genuine to the bone. I could do without the acoustic songs, which are stripped of almost all of the cool shit and just kinda drag along. A pretty impressive emo-punk band, but sadly this may be these New Yorkers' swang song. Let's hope they can keep it going, or at least form other bands (we'll probably never hear). -- Jason Schreurs

DEAD AND GONE - *The Beautician* (Gold Standard Laboratories -- PO Box 178262, San Diego, CA, 92177) Come and see the freaks! Dead and Gone are one of the strangest bands on the heavy end of the spectrum, combining an early AmRep skronk with a truly odd thrash attack. Most of the songs on The Beautician leap and bound between Jesus Lizard, Nomeansno and Jenny Piccolo, often within a two-minute time frame. It doesn't matter if they are in rabid dog mode, slow mind-fuck mode, or mid-tempo neck shredding mode, Dead and Gone play strange, fascinating music. Like the Bearded Lady, everyone should pay the price of admission and have a look at Dead and Gone. -- Jason Schreurs

DEERHOOF - *Reveille* (Kill Rock Stars, 120 NE State Ave. PMB 418, Olympia, WA 98501, www.killrockstars.com) Wow! This is really cool, really different, really unique stuff. It's a strange but compelling blend of Stereolab-style pop with just plain weirdness. It's light and bouncy, it's angular and piercing, it's everything at once. It's brilliance in the face of insanity, that's what it is. The vocals, where they exist, are pure and shining, just like those of Stereolab. The music underneath the madness has that Stereolab-esque bounce and shine, too. But there's that chaotic stuff all over the place, going everywhere and nowwhere. It's this contrast that's so fascinating and makes this one of my favorite new releases. - Paul Silver

DESPERATE MEASURES - *It's On Your Hands* (Youngblood Records 217 W.Main St. Ephrata, PA 17522) The slick, structured chops of classic youth crew outfits such as Side By Side meld with an unbridled drive, and enthusiastic energy that is truly unique to this outfit. As anyone who has seen Desperate Measures live can attest to, the singular, vital punch infused into every fiber of the stylized, classic delivery wielded here adds a unique, ineffable feel to an already tried and true presentation. Unlike many who tackle such a style, this band is *exciting and vital* as many of their peers are not, and that certain underlying esprit shines through in every group shout along, chorus, and breakdown. The six songs on this record are certainly accomplished in form, but are even more so in spirit. They mean it. - Mike Ramek

ANI DIFRANCO - *So Much Shouting, So Much Laughter* (Righteous Babe Records) The follow up to her first live album ("Living in Clip"), is again a transformation of music. Some of her best known songs ("32 Flavors," "Dilate," & "Not a Pretty Girl"), are given a fresh reading, while still holding on to the songs original feel. What first comes to mind when listening to this two CD set is 'style.' Ani has a way of connecting deeply with the listener, like she's giving a one on one show. Her band, including keyboard, bass, drums, & horns rise to the occasion, giving the music a softness or a more rockin' sound wherever needed. Lyrically, Ani is amazing! Whether it's politics or about life, she gets you to think a little differently. On "Self Evident" she speaks (her music is more like song/poems), of the World Trade Center. During the nine minute plus tirade against the US Government, the news media, etc. Ani gives a history lesson that will make your head spin, and above all will make you think and hopefully react. - Phil Rainone

DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN WITH MIKE PATTON- *Irony is a Dead Scene* (Epitaph, 2798 Sunset Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90026). This is the band's debut release with the label very well-known for its classic punk rock releases. This EP is anything but punk rock though. For those familiar with the band, and familiar with Mike Patton: just picture both parties joining forces, and bringing their own elements to the table creating an incredible mix of sonic noise, and over-the-top vocals. The album contains 3 new tracks plus a good cover of the Aphex Twins' "Come To Daddy". The first song, "Hollywood Squares" already begins blasting in your face like a semi at 90 miles an hour. It has its breakdowns here and there but it's pretty chaotic for the most part. Track 2 is "Pig Latin" which begins out with some keyboards and clean guitars, then Mike goes into his usual psychotic way of "singing". The song continues and builds, followed by a breakdown reminiscent of Mike's own band FANTOMAS. It ends with the first two parts repeating themselves. Track 3 on the album is the highlight, he masterpiece, if you will. Clocking in at six minutes, "When Good Dogs do Bad Things" is an incredible song. There are too many parts, breakdowns, and build-ups to be listed here, so you just have to hear it for yourself. Then the cover of the A. Twins song closes this amazing 18-minute EP, that's sure to break some ground in the world of hardcore and extreme music. -- Phil Pinto

DILLINGER FOUR - *Situationist Comedy* (FAT Wreck Chords PO BOX 193690 San Francisco, CA 94119-9690) In what is by far their strongest, most cohesive musical statement since the stellar Midwestern Songs of the Americas full length some years back, Dillinger Four offer up a uniformly excellent thirteen song dosage of heavy hitting, bombastic melody. This newest chapter in their articulate and humorous legacy, telling tales of conformity, work, routine, and interpersonal/socio-political turmoil, showcases more of the grimy, frenetic, bass rumbling of rambunctious behemoth St. Patrick, the razor riffage and gruff vocal prowess of Billy 'Bartender' (as he is known herein), and the stellar, higher pitched delivery of vocalist/ guitarist Erik, all interwoven to produce a singular infectious bruising not soon forgotten. Songs such as the pummeling, anthemic "Folk Song", which melds an infectious, deep seated bass line and chord progression scheme to a stellar chorus-filled crescendo, and the orchestrated, tempo-shifting "Labor Issues In The Toy Department" with its thundering penchant for melodic experimentation, showcase subtle, intricate musical progressions over earlier work, while winners like "All Rise For The Rational Anthem" and the sorrowful "Sellthehousesellthecar..." recall the classic blend of syrupy Raygun-tinged melodic abrasion that this band perfected on earlier work. D4 fans who were a bit let down by their second full length, "Versus God" (a worthy effort in itself, but of a less flooring nature than its predecessor) will find "Situationist Comedy" a truly redemptive effort. --Mike Ramek

DISCOUNT - *Singles Collection # 1* (New American Dream, PO Box 265, Balboa Island, CA 92662) This is a nice trip down memory lane. Even though Discount have been broken up for about two years, their music still sounds fresh and this first singles collection proves that point in spades. Though not exactly in chronological order, this collection of songs, pulled together from various 7-inches and compilations, showcases the amazing growth of the band in a very short period of time. Even from early tracks like "Runaway" and "Uptown Subway," you can hear Discount breaking away from the traditional pop-punk mold and forming a sound that would always be uniquely theirs. But it's when you get to songs like "Streets," "Trouble In The Skies" and "Bloody Mediocrity" that it becomes all too obvious why Discount is still spoken about with great reverence even after it's demise. Discount is one of my all time favorites and the chance to hear their songs again is like having my birthday and Christmas occur on the same day. Here's to many, many more colletions. - Oliver Lyons

DIVISION OF LAURALEE - *Black City* (Burning Heart Records) On "Black City," Division of Lauralee create a lean and hungry punk/garage sound like the Stones captured on "Exile On Mainstreet." Starting with "Need to Get Some," these 12 songs crave your attention. What you'll notice first are lead singers Per & Jonas' screeching vocals over the band's exuberant energized playing. Like the Hives & Hellicopters (both bands are hellbent on playing punk/garage also), they come to us via Sweden. It almost seems like a few 60's garage rock albums (Troggs, Love, Stooges, etc.), made their way to Sweden, got picked up at a garage sale, and made their way around from band to band, each one creating something more from the original. Songs like "I Guess I'm Healed," & "Second Rule Is" create a trippy, psychedelic swirl that slows the pace between the songs that you'll be shaking your fist to. Seems like Division of Lauralee are dedicated to helping save your rock n' roll soul. Not many bands out there today are willing to take that risk anymore. - Phil Rainone

DOWNPORE - *Portrait of a Sideshow Freak* (www.downpore.com) In a world where it seems as if every band wishes to be "atmospheric" and "complex," those adjectives are quickly becoming overused and becoming vacant of meaning. However, dear friends, Downpore will restore your faith in emotional, heavy music because these guys do things the right way. Not as whiny and self-pitying as Staind or as eerie as Tool, Downpore balances their emotional scars with superior musical force, and the result is a thrilling collection of hardened, forceful tracks that expose great pain through aggressive musicianship. The opening four tracks will have you speechless if not jumping around your room, but for my money, "Sideshow Freak" and "Inches Away" should be all over the conscience of every hard rock fan in the word by the end of the summer or there is simply no justice in the world. While the brief "Rebirth of Freak" and the surprisingly quiet "Time Won' t Wait" seem ill-placed, the band retaliates with the thunderous "F@#k You", one of the great anthems ofself-expression and pride ever penned. The band's press release bragged about having their sticker appear in the video for Joey Ramone's "What A Wonderful World"; Portrait of a Sideshow Freak should ratchet up their notoriety and garner them larger exposure than that (as cool as that is). Go find this and treat yourself to rock and roll therapy. - Rich Quinlan

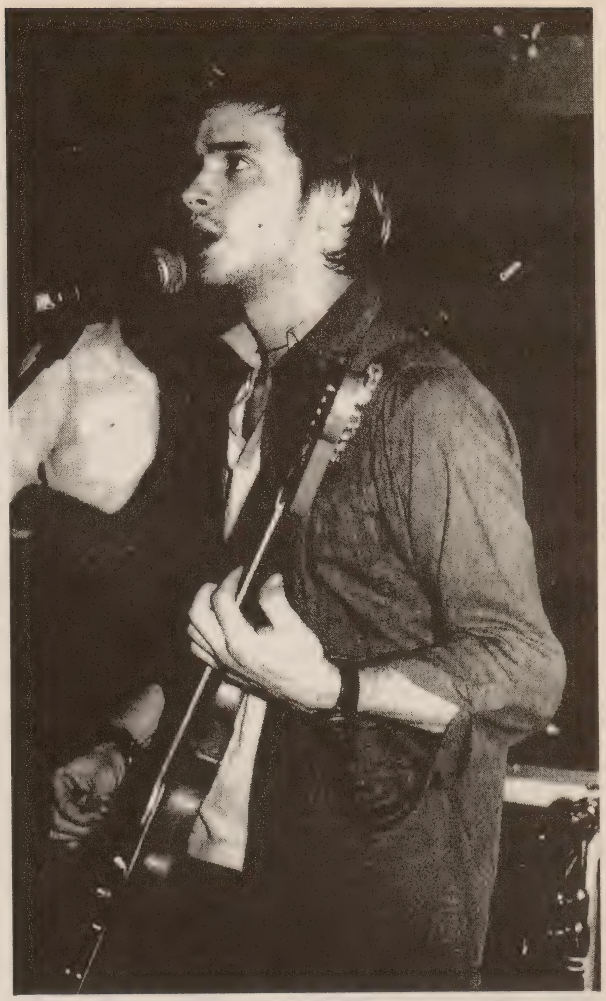
DRAG THE RIVER - *Closed* (Owned & Operated/Upland) I love this one. It's Chad Price of ALL, J.J. Nobody of The Nobodys and some other folks of the Colorado punk circuit banding together and playing some heartbreak-based country music. Even Stephen Egerton is in on the action. Every song's about drinking, pilling and being bummed out -- an emo attitude with an American roots sound, very charming. -Darren Paltrowitz

DRAGPIPE – Music For The Last Day Of Your Life (Interscope) The first time I saw Dragpipe, a few years ago at a small NJ club, I was blown away by the band's explosive stage presence and their raunchy, Guns N Roses-like heaviness. Then they got signed to Interscope. You always wonder what a major label is going to do to the local bands they sign. In this case, they turned them into Linkin Park. – Jim Testa

DROPKICK MURPHYS - *Live on St Patricks Day From Boston, MA* (Hellcat Records) Very rarely in Punk Rock have I come across a band that wears its heart on its sleeve as passionately as The Murphys (the Bosstones are right up there with them), whether it's their music or their home town. Recorded in Boston on St Patty's Day this past year, the band tears though this 74 min set like it was their last gig. Opening with a bagpipe & drum cadence (Spicy & Matt respectively), the Murphys launch into "For Boston." You can hear the frenzied mob singing in unison ("LET'S GO MURPHY'S, LET'S GO MURPHY'S")!! The Murphys rise to the occasion, building momentum ("Upstarts & Broken Hearts" and "Which Side Are You On" are scorching barnburners), and sprinkle more references to their beloved Boston along the way (check their logo in the CD case of a skull and cross bones with a Boston Bruins helmet). Even better are their very cool covers of The Standells "Dirty Water" & "Charlie & the MTA." With the refrain "Ohh, Boston you're my home" from "Dirty Water,", the crowd is right up their with the band singing a remotely obscure song like it was one of the biggest hits ever. Originals like "Good Rats," "The Torch," & "Spicy McHaggis Jig" are turned into incendiary hometown anthems. During "Spicy" (Mr. McHaggis gets his groove on), the band invites the ladies on stage to sing and covort to the ballsy, hybrid Irish jig! I think Steve & Sean (two of our crew), best summed up this live album. Listening to the first few songs, Sean told Steve how great it sounded. Steve replied, "Just wait until you hear the songs we know!" It was a backhanded compliment (they both love "Good Rats," "Which side Are You On," & especially "Skin Head"). We had seen the Dropkick Murphys at Birch Hill and we were blown away! I think they found a deeper appreciation of the band's music listening to this live recording. - Phil Rainone

DRUNK INJUNS - *From Where The Sun Now Stands I will Fight No More, Forever!* Skate Punk Series Vol. 3 (Alternative Tentacles) Before Wu Tang Clan became the popular skater soundtrack, and baggy pants and gold chains were just a bad idea in some kid's head, skateboarding had a more suitable brand of music that worked better for grinding the shit out of the pool coping or even a fuckin' hand rail. San Francisco's Drunk Injuns were one of the premier skate punk bands back in the early 80's. The Injuns were basically Los Olvidados with the addition of well-known Skate photographer Morizen Foche better known as Mofo. But like The Residents before them nobody had a clue. The Injuns big eye grabbing shtick was wearing skull masks that had spiked Mohawks. Pretty damn cool for 1983, now everywhere ya turn some dumb band is sporting monster masks. The disc, which has the longest fucking title I've ever typed, contains all their early recordings from 83-84. As far as the tuneage is concerned they all totally shred with great pissed off lyrics and buzz saw guitars that are sure to sound even better blasting out of your sprayed painted ghetto blaster at full volume. – Rick K.

EARTHRIDE - *Taming of the Demons* (Southern Lord Records, PO Box 291967, Los Angeles, CA, 90029) - Stoner rock doom metal with Sabbath riffs aplenty and the ugliest vocals this side of Lemmy and his warts. Like all bong hit heavy groove rock, Earthride requires a certain, um, mood in order to fully enjoy their tunage. Okay, you have to be totally ripped on pot laced with angel dust, but since this friendly reviewer isn't going back on that horse anytime soon, I'll just have to pretend I'm stoned. Wow! Killer tunes, dude! – Jason Schreurs



Val Emmich

EAST BAY CHASERS – "Johnny is a Junky" CD/EP (Rats Records, POB 5619, Berkeley, CA 94705, www.rats-records.com) It's about time something other than useless liberal politics came out of Berkeley. This quick 5 song romp has an energetic, cranky guitar driven sound to it that has been compared to another old school east coast outfit, the Adolescents. – Tom Brebric

ELECTRELANE – *Rock It To The Moon* (Mr. Lady Records) Delve into indy-inspired electronic pop that explores as many dissonant atmospheric instrumentals as it does good ol' fashioned garage rock. The centerpiece of this femme quartet is the vintage, Compact Farfisa keyboard. While the retro magic is being Farfed up, the sonic guitar assault chases it about with sticks and carrots. "Long Dark" might just be the long lost, surf-rock theme from Phantom of The Opera, but don't send them to Broadway just yet: "Spartakiade" is a new wave anthem, in the red. They've been known to tour in good company, so don't be late. –Greg Matherly

VAL EMMICH – *Slow Down Kid* (Artist Amp/Childlike Records) After sowing his wild oats in the bands Ben Trovato and Awake Asleep, with college and (presumably) adolescence now behind him, *Slow Down Kid* represents Val Emmich's bid to be taken seriously as a singer/songwriter. Most of these songs involve introspective, self-questioning themes, but while the lyrics are often private and personal, the music remains expansive. To wit, it rocks. Sometimes it even rocks out; "Selfish Blues" is Emmich's bid for a Third Eye Blind-type drive-time anthem. I just hope the guy doesn't wind up hanging "maturity" around his neck like a yoke. The best songs here have a youthful exuberance that's missing in the mopey, Jeff Buckley-flavored opening track (and newest song on the CD,) "The Boy Who Cried Wolf". Far better are uptempo rockers like "Shock" (my personal favorite,) the catchy mid-tempo "Privacy Attracts A Crowd" (dig the Elvis Costello-ish wordplay!), and the wrenching "Unstable." For a change of pace, there's the zippy, sardonic "Ratrace." While the lyrics and production lay the sarcasm on with a trowel, you gotta admire Emmich for poking fun at yuppies when most of his peers are killing themselves right now trying to become one. Throughout the album, production (by Wayne Dorrell at The Pigeon Club) is bright, crisp, economical, and full of interesting guitar sounds and tempo changes. As one of the most visible of New Jersey's new generation of indie musicians, as well as a partner with Andy Gesner in Artist Amplification, Val Emmich has a lot more than just his own career resting on his shoulders. Judging by this promising debut, this kid isn't about to slow down. – Jim Testa

ENON –*High Society* (Touch and Go Records, PO Box 25520, Chicago, IL 60625) So you may, or may not care to know, that the founder debonair of Enon is New York's Dayton, Ohio transplant, John Schmersal—formerly of the controlled chaos known as Brainiac—now tragically defunct. *High Society* comes two years after Enon's debut, *Believo!*, which spins more like a scrapbook of audio oddities than a rock record, a fact that should not be surprising given Schmersal's history. From a guy who always manages to surprise, however, you really expect no surprises, but *High Society* has done it. Wow, I say! This is a fine and dandy rock and roll record, for sure. Now please note, there are changes: Matt Schulz on the skins, post-*Let's Crash*, and Blonde Redhead's sweet pill, Toko Yasuda, at once laying down the low frequencies and some candy-coated vocals. On their latest, Enon gracefully stagger around an indy-pop constant and—whether it be a sudden overblown guitar molestation or the dripping irony of the synthesizer—the hard edge is never far away to give your brainwashed sense of pop a swift kick in the ass. Check this out; it's sweet, darkly critical, and glamorous. -Greg Matherly

THE ERGS - "3 Guys 12 Eyes" 7-inch EP (Woah Oh, 52 McLoughlin St., Glen Cove, NY 11542) The Ergs (by the way, an erg is work equal to the work done by a force of one dyne over the distance of one centimeter), play bouncy, poppy punk that revels in the band members' dorkiness and blatant love of the Ramones and the Replacements (check out "Feeling Minnesota" 's intro for proof of the latter). It is typical guy-loses-girl heartbreak lyrical content, but fun is fun, and this is a sugary, three chord delight. Drummer Mikey Erg has no hesitation about revealing his sensitive side as he pines about his romantic mistakes on "If You Don't" and "1000 Letters". If you are fans of the two aforementioned brilliant acts, or if you bob your head to the likes of Dirt Bike Annie, you will adore this. Additionally, the closing quasi-surf "Honolulu Hornrims" is another refreshing example of a band that refuses to take itself too seriously. Plus, it's on red vinyl! Go buy this. - Rich Quinlan

EVEN IN BLACKOUTS – *Myths & Imaginary Magicians* (Hope & Non Things, PO Box 148010, Chicago IL 60614) Female-fronted new-wavey bop-till-you-drop fun, featuring John "Jughead" Pierson (ex Screeching Weasel) on guitar. They even cover SW's classic "Hey Suburbia" (and Operation Ivy's "Knowledge!") although both punk anthems sound more like something by Katrina & The Waves or the Bangles here. There's also a nifty surf instrumental and the Blondie-ish "For Pete's Sake." Gidget's gone punk, kids. Catch the wave. – Jim Testa

EVEN WORSE *You've Ruined Everything* (Grand Theft Audio, 501 W. Glenoaks Blvd. Glendale CA 91202) Listen up, kids. Somewhere in between the Ramones and Agnostic Front, NYC had a hardcore scene that was more about bloody good fun than bloody noses. The CBGB scene of the late 70's was mostly older folks in their mid to late twenties; after the Ramones, Talking Heads, Patti Smith and Blondie moved up and out of CBGBs, bands like the Misguided, the Nihilistics, Kraut, and Even Worse (and even the baby version of the Beastie Boys) turned the scene over to the kids. This happened to be at about the same time that I was starting Jersey Beat, so I was right there, and man, those days were a lot of fun. Claustrophobic, insane, all-night parties at A7, *Noise: The Show* on WNYU-FM, Hardcore Sundays at the Peppermint Lounge. Even Worse, which featured The Big Takeover's Jack Rabid on drums, went through several lineup changes; this disc – half studio tracks and half recorded live – captures the best-remembered version of the band, with the sassy, beguiling Rebecca Korbet (part Patti Smith, part Bette Midler, with a little Exene on the side) on vocals. I caught this lineup twice that I remember – once on the night at Mile Square City in Hoboken when the Hell's Angels showed up and started a barroom brawl straight out of an old John Wayne flick, and once at a tiny dive under the PATH tracks in Harrison, NJ. Listening to these tracks now, you can hear the band's influences all too clearly – Buzzcocks, Clash, L.A.'s X and Black Flag – as well as the deliriously naïve anarchist politics of the era. Punk was politics in 1981 but that didn't mean you couldn't have fun at the same time; what I remember most about Even Worse was the band's free-spirited sense of humor about the scene and themselves -- "We Suck!" was their big punk-rock anthem. You can also hear the sense of adventure and excitement that shot through those days, when punk-rock seemed very new again and every show was like a basement party with all your best friends. If you were there, this disc offers the nostalgic rush of finding a box of home movies in the basement. If you've only heard about those days, here's a rare chance for an inside look at a vital chapter in NYC's indie underground. – Jim Testa

Kristin Forbes

FARTZ - *Injustice: 15 Working Class Songs* (Alternative Tentacles) Another case of music that's cool and politics that suck. The Fartz are a Seattle based band that date back to the early 80's. Way back then they just couldn't relate to a truly great American – Reagan. The Fartz got back together in 1998 after a long hiatus and are still as hard edged and h.c. as ever and still don't like republicans. I'll give 'em bonus points for their sense of humor – especially the inner sleeve of a last supper with various world leaders and figure heads. Most of the songs sound the same – but State Control still rocks after all these years. – Tom Brebric

FINCH - *What It Is To Burn* (Drive -Thru Records) Alt/rockers Finch have a hard-edged sound. Thanks to Randy & Alex's double buzzsaw guitar attack, Nate's no-holds-barred vocals, and a powerful rhythm section featuring Alex on drums & Derek on bass, they have a sound that's fresh and original. "New Beginnings," "Letters To You," or any song here, has an original lyrical perspective, and flat-out rocks. Finch will also be playing on this Summers Vans Warped Tour. Buy their CD, then see 'em live! - Phil Rainone

THE FIRE SHOW - *Saint the Fire Show* (Perishable Records, PO Box 57-8804, Chicago, IL 60657-8804) It's still the same, quirky, off-kilter Fire Show, but on this, their third and final album, they've toned it down somewhat. If anything the Fire Show does can be called "laid back," this is it. There's still the same strangeness, the noisy bits, the cool vocals, interesting arrangements, and mixing of various musical styles. But it's not as manic, not as epic, not as over-the-top as past efforts. It's as if escaped mental patients are back on their meds, but only a partial dose. The result is still adventurous, still a unique sound, but more mature, a bit tamed from its wild youth. Recommended. – Paul Silver

FIRST GRADE CRUSH – *Out Time Down Here* (Jump Up! Records) Not exactly a ska band, First Grade Crush are more like a punk band with horns. With a somewhat inferior 3-piece horn section as well as overly simple punk guitars that confine themselves to basic chords (as opposed to percussive ska licks,) FGC come off like a minor-league Less Than Jake (less catchy songs, less talented musicians.) First Grade Crush does boast a theremin player, which makes them unique, but it's overuse dulls the listener, making you want to smash the fragile thing after the album's eleven songs. – Johnny Puke

THE FITSNERS - *50 Ways to Leave Your Mother* (:Memphis@11345.com) Ted Keaton (vocals and guitar), has a cool, snarly, British accent (like The Kinks' Ray Davies or Green Day's Billy Joe), that makes the Fitsners instantly recognizable. "Penelope," "Beer & Perfume," or any song here is a hook filled sing-a-long. Spirited performances that will stick to your brain like bubble gum on your sneakers. Formed in 1994, the closest they got to England was Rochester, NY, so how Ted got that preppy English accent is a mystery. Yet, it's part of what separates them from the rest of the power pop/punk bands. Clever arrangements ("Worst Case Girl"), and unpretentious lyrics ("She's Happy Without Me"), solidify the band's sound. I'll bet they're fun to see live! - Phil Rainone

FIXER - 3-song CD EP (fixermusic.com) Yeah, you, right over there, buddy! Ya wanna hear a shit-hot pulverizing 3-song EP of fiercely in-your- face, no-foolin', bulishit-free straight-up confrontational hard-rock bossness? Yes, you do! Then this here thunderous platter of kick-ass aural aggressiveness is the CD for you. For starters, Evan R. Saffer's fabulously full-throated howl of a voice possesses a magnetic pull that's impossible to resist. The stinging staccato guitar nffs shoot out of the speaker like savagely sharp and lethal sonic darts. The relentlessly driving drums keep the beats fat, chunky, and steady throughout. Amid all the wild-assed noise and fury these guys don't forget to add handy helpings of pretty melodicism and consummate musicianship to the already tasty proceedings. And the band's attitude -- angry, bitter and defiant, yet still resilient and optimistic - scores a bull's eye too. – Joe Wawyrnizak

THE FLESHIES – *The Game Of Futbol EP* (Adeline Records) Unashamedly punk, the Fleshies may not be as well-known as some of their obvious artistic brethren on labels like Epitaph or Fat Wreck Chords, but they rock just as hard. *The Game Of Futbol EP* offers up six slabs o' sonic overkill, guaranteed by the Reverend to knock the plaster from your walls with a blistering three-chord aural attack. If "Fists Of Mercy" is a feedback-laden assault on your senses, the title track is a slower, more introspective ode to our national pastime. The fast-n-furious "Bon Bon" kicks it back into high gear with shouted, strained vocals and loud guitars, "Johnny Shenanigans" offers chaotic cacophony and six-string madness while "The Tickler" closes out the EP with a revved-up, 120-mph raver. In the best punk tradition, the title track is the only song clocking in at over three minutes, and the entire EP wraps up at an exhausting quarter-hour. They may not be the most polished gems in the punk rock universe, but the Fleshies are definitely one of the more sincere and unpredictable outfits plying their trade these days. The Rev sez "check 'em out!" (www.adelinerecords.net) – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

FLOGGING MOLLY - *Drunken Lullabies* (Side One Dummy Records) Last year on a hot, steamy (about100° in the shade) afternoon, we walked out on a grassy field to cover the Vans Warped Tour in Boston, Mass. Flogging Molly had started to play, and we heard the sound of Celtic music (fiddle, tin whistle, accordion, etc.), mixed with loud guitars, drums, & bass. (We were expecting mostly Punk Rock bands). It was just so cool and rejuvinating to hear them. It was like a breath of fresh air! After their set I found their promo table and got a copy of their disc. We listened to it on the long ride home to Jersey. On their new release Drunken Lullabies, they give us more of their cool mix of Celtic/punk rock! Dave King's vocals are just the right mix of of Celtic and punk angst (just like the band's music). On songs like the title cut, Rebels Of The Sacret Heart, Swagger, & The Kiilburn High Road (Dennis Casey/electric guitar, rocks out on this tune), Flogging Molly sings of Heaven, Hell, faith & redemption, all the while hoisting a pint ortwo, inviting you to 'get jiggy' (Irish Jigs that is), on the dance floor! - Phil Rainone

THE FLYING LUTTENBACHERS - *Infection and Decline* (Troubleman Unlimited, 16 Willow Street, Bayonne, NJ 07002, www.troublemanunlimited.com) They're back! And this time it's with their tenth full-length album. They're as noisy as ever, maybe even noiser. But this time, wait, what do I hear? Is that structure? Incredible as it may seem, there's some actual structure in places in some of the tracks on this disc! All kidding aside, the Luttenbachers blend the worlds of free jazz and rock and roll. The result is controlled chaos, the best kind. This isn't for everyone, but if you have an adventurous soul, check it out. - Paul Silver

KRISTIN FORBES - Neighborhood (247 Cambridge St. #2 Aliston, MA 02134) Kristin Forbes joins the illustrious ranks of Tris McCall (before you ask, I think his astonishing music's all the way), Johnny Puke (totally punk, so ya know he's the goods), and Jim Testa (his songs are as sweet, lively, and endearing as the man himself) as yet another Jersey Beat staff member who's gone from writing about music to actually doing it. And, just like the others, Forbes makes the transition with completely spot-on results. No complaints about the voice: Kristin' throaty, formidably robust bluesy wail soars right for the sky with stirring assertiveness. The catchy, jaunty, jump-at-you punchy folk-rockin' sound, filled out by thrilling riffin' guitar and dynamically kickin' drumbeats, bristles with an infectious go-for-it spirit and enthusiasm. Moreover, the fast, snappy tempos never flag for a minute, the gutsy, hammering beats keep hoppin' start to finish, and the smart, clear, thoughtful lyrics mine a finely affecting line in optimistic yearning. In short, this is one sonic neighborhood that's well worth revisiting as often as you can. – Joe Wawyrzniak

FRANK BLACK & THE CATHOLICS – Black Letter Days (SpinArt) I guess nobody really gets Frank Black and to tell you the truth, I can't say that I do either, but I enjoy his music and what he's doing now seems just as vital, catchy, and varied as his work with the fabled Pixies. But boy, is he unorthodox. Black Letter Days is the darker of a pair of albums he's releasing at the same time (see below). Both are similar in that they're all over the place – country arrangements, straightahead rock songs, ballads… just songs, basically. This CD has 18 songs on it so it baffles me that Frank would release two records at the same time that aren't related to each other in some way (like, one acoustic and one rock, or something like that.) Regardless, if you liked the Pixies or any of his solo stuff, you can't go wrong here. – Johnny Puke

FRANK BLACK & THE CATHOLICS - *Devils Workshop* (SpinArt) Released along with another CD, *Back Letter Days*, this one is a bit more poppy and upbeat. "Whiskey In Your Shoes" and "Are You Headed My Way" have the potential to be singles. Guest stars include keyboards by ex-Wall of Voodoo frontman Stan Ridgeway and guitar by ex-Pixie Joey Santiago. – Johnny Puke

FREE BEER *The Only Beer That Matters* (Alternative Tentacles) This is the first release in a series of reissues of skate-punk records from the Eighties. Free Beer were almost the definition of skate punk – they played a style of music rooted in 70's punk but with underlying surf tones and notes & melodies more traditionally 'rock n roll' than most 70's bands. Beyond such aesthetics, all of the members of the band were hardcore skaters, most notably Tony and Tommy Guerrero, who would end up selling lots more maple decks than they ever would records. For a re-release there is almost no liner notes on the band's history and no mention of the original sources of these recordings, which is totally disappointing. I remember one cut here, "Premature Enlistment," which originally appeared on Maximum Rock N Roll's seminal compilation "All Quiet On The Western Front." You'll have to guess where the other 14 songs came from. – Johnny Puke

FRIEND/ENEMY - *10 Songs* (Perishable Records, PO Box 57-8804, Chicago, IL 60657-8804) With members from such acts as the Owls, Plastic Crime Wave, Cap N' Jazz, and Joan of Arc, you know before the opening note is struck that this will be a wildly experimental effort. Featuring the voice of Tim Kinsella, Friend/Enemy is a kaleidoscope of sound effects, loops and moments of breath taking achievement. Whenever a band plays such a frantic game of musical trial and error, there will be times when he best laid plans go awry. While that does occur ("Do the Stand On One Foot Dance to the Radio Rodeo" is simply a mess), the overall sum outshines the parts. What impressed me most was how each member contributed to this multilayered cornucopia of ideas without being overshadowed. The instrumental "Just Like Ann E. Fay's Blues" was lovely, but I was drawn to the more outlandish efforts, such as "Thax Douglas," Out At the Inner" and "I Once Loved Someone, Etc.." The combination of all these artists and visions made for a supergroup of sots, flying in the face of convention which will delight those who revel in challenging yet equally exhilarating music. - Rich Quinlan

FUNCH *Juggernaut* (Rockatron Records 502 9th Street, Carlstadt, NJ 07072) I was reading some reviews aloud to a friend and she said I was being too harsh. With that in mind, I'm going to try my best to be more positive…Funch play old-school punk rock (leaning heavier on the rock than the punk) with a subtle spookiness like the Misfits ten times removed (when I say 'subtle,' I really mean 'weak'). I could also make a Naked Raygun comparison, maybe. Just held the phone up to my friend Kara to see what she thought. She was silent. See, it's not just me. Funch's website doesn't work right now, but according to the logo on the back of the CD, they've been together since 1994, which is fairly impressive, I guess, since stuff just doesn't last so long anymore. -Brandon Stosuy

FURY – *Resurrection* (Jade Tree Records, 2310 Kennwynn Rd., Wilmington, DE, 19810) – How refreshing to hear a band's discography run only 12 minutes long. Basically ¾ of Swiz (and later Sweetbelly Freakdown) with a belligerent Chris Thomson (Ignition, Circus Lupus, The Monorchid, Skull Kontrol, etc.) on vocals, Fury recorded only six songs in 1989; but what slices of bombast they are! It's obvious Fury were deeply entrenched in the DC hardcore scene, but while Ian MacKaye was off finding himself in Fugazi, Thomson and crew were paying homage to early DC hardcore while infusing the emotion that made the members' later bands so intense. Strangely enough, Fury's "Shotgun" is like the evil twin combination of Fugazi's "Give Me the Cure" and "Shut the Door," full of gore and vile recollection. It and the rest of Resurrection possess a darker edge than most of the DC hardcore of yesteryear -- perhaps a tribute to DC oddballs Void and their demented hardcore attack. – Jason Schreurs

GAY DAD - *Transmission* (Thirsty Ear Recordings) There's strange contradictions to the sound of this band. It's got fuzzy guitar but a light, breezy feel. It's got parts that sound out of the ordinary, but other parts sound pretty much like standard alternative rock. "Nightclub," the third track on the disc, is an example of the more indie sounding Gay Dad, with a definite snotty feel. But the very next track, Harder Faster," is kind of lame, bloated stuff. For the most part that's the way many of the songs are: they're great sounding until the vocals come in, and then they start sounding very commercially oriented. - Paul Silver

THE GENERATORS - *State of the Nation* (TKO Records - 3126 West Cary St. #303, Richmond, VA, 23221) - L.A.'s Generators storm through six surprisingly melodic punk songs and two live cuts from a performance at the Holidays in the Sun/USA Festival in 2000. The studio cuts are sing along punk/hardcore with hook-laden choruses and a fun feel. It's the same three chords heard so many times, but the production is clean and the songs are strong. - Jason Schreurs

GEORGE IS DEAD – "Hate Fueled" EP (www.georgeisdead.com)This 5 song EP is full of some blistering punk rock. You can also hear a little garage rock (kinda like the Mad Daddy's), mixed in. Shock-core rockers (George-vocals, Martini-guitar, Gary-bass, and Lenny-drums) will get your adrenaline pumping on any of the songs here. The music and their live show is definitely for hardcore fans of punk. It's rejuvenating to see a band that has something to say and have fun blowing off steam in the process! -Phil Rainone

Once you get past the theatrics – there's some very angry and offensive punk rock here. Known for smashing things into his forehead to draw blood (he considers it therapeutic), George has fronted this NJ shock-core band since 1999. Old time jersey h.c. fans might also recognize the bass player, Lenny Sblendorio, ex Buy Our Records owner and drummer for Bedlam. Poignant tunes about sodomizing hookers, wanting people dead and drinking and drugging. The fact that the band covers Genocide and G.G. Allin tells you about the influences. I must admit, I am curious enough to want to catch the live set. – Tom Brebric

THE GIRAFFES – *Helping You Help Yourself* (www.giraffes.com) Demented, pornographic, electric and wide-awake, black and blue and red all over, this much-anticipated release captures a substantial portion of the intensity and excitement surrounding Brooklyn's furious Giraffes. Anybody who has ever seen guitarist Damien Paris perform will not be surprised by the intelligence and ambition informing the stratospheric solos recorded here -- few instrumentalists in the city have the capacity to draw connections between styles and approaches so instinctively. Supported by the muscular (and surprisingly propulsive, for music so heavy) rhythm section of Andrew Totolos and Tim Kent, the charismatic Paris swings effortlessly from classic-metal shredding to hammer-ons to authentic Memphis soul licks to soaring and angular lyrical phrases reminiscent of Duane Allman at his most attention-grabbing -- and sometimes in the same twelve bars! Indeed, *Helping You Help Yourself* preserves most of the musical features that make Giraffes shows so riveting (and occasionally straight-up frightening): the surf-rock-meets-flamenco tension buildup on "Manchester United," the spacious, mounting waltz-time outro of "Looting In The A.M.," the unabridged guitar assault of "The Ballad of Sissyfist," the whiplash riffs of "I'll Be Your Daddy." Thus, those Giraffes fans searching for a good representation of the group's undeniable musical excellence will find ample satisfaction here. And yet the most remarkable feature of this outstanding rock album comes from an unexpected source: Lead singer Aaron Lazar, whose theatrical approach and alternately threatening and hilarious stage stance is always compelling in live performance, but whose voice can't always be heard over the combined might of the Paris-Totolos-Kent maelstrom. His voice mixed clearly and bravely foregrounded, Lazar proves himself a master of delivery and subtle inflecton, all without ever sacrificing power – he is a huge, dominating presence on this record, communicative, terrifying, funny, deeply sympathetic even when articulating lyrical content that is, er… unlikely to win Tipper Gore's approval, to say the least. It's a dark and twisted vision of New York City that he illustrates here, and he is unafraid to lead us down some sordid alleys. Tawdry sex, overt threats, homicide, football hooliganism, looting and pillaging, two-fisted braggadocio and cheap torment -- Lazar shines his flashlight on all of them. Even when he shouts, he does so tunefully, recalling Morrissey and Greg Dulli as often as Bon Scott, and his participation insures that helping you help yourself is a thinking man's heavy album, a writer's delight as well as a guitar aficionado's wet dream. An absolute must for hard rock fans, and appreciators of the rougher side of the Brooklyn scene. - Tris McCall

GIRLS AGAINST BOYS – *You Can't Fight What You Can 't See* (Jade Tree) Back to indiedom after the disappointing, keyboard-laden major-label *Freak*on*ica* , GvsB seem to have found their second wind. Frontman Scott McCloud is back to his surly, swaggering , sexy best on hard-hitting, slinky grunge-core tracks like "Basstation," "Tweaker," "Miami Skyline," and "One Perfect Thing." The one disappoint is the production, which actually highlights and makes intelligible McCloud's vocals. The band's lyrics have always been a bit of a mystery, but usually a cool catchphrase or two would emerge from the murk. Here, where you can hear every word, you realize that the band doesn't have much to say, and lines like "I don' t like Hollywood" just fall flat. (Let's face it, Scott McCloud is *the* most Hollywood-like rocker ever to live in Brooklyn.) Irony is dead, dude, but that's okay, 'cos Girls Against Boys still rocks, and in the end, that's all that really matters. – Jim Testa

GLASSJAW - *Worship and Tribute* (Warner Bros) Glassjaw's 2nd album, and first for Warner Bros. still contains the nu-metal crushing flavor of their last release, "Everything You Wanted to Know About Silence." Featured on this past Aprils Surf & Skate Fest in Asbury, Glassjaw blended nicely with the bouncier, fresh faced pop/punk bands. Songs like "Tip Your Bartender," "Trailer Park Jesus," and "Radio Cambodia" slowly build the bands sound and identify through hard work and perseverance. I think they were a hit at Surf & Skate. They left the audience asking, "Where did they come from?" Phil Rainone

GLIMR - *South Dakota Logic Mechanism* (10 GeV Records, www.10gevrecords.com) The first track starts out pretty slow, sounding like pretty standard alterna-pop. But after getting past the first minute or two it improves alot and gets an edgier sound, with a bit of a math-like sound. The second and fourth tracks are all out indie-psych with a bit of a twist. Track three is an ambient-ish instrumental that's very repetitive, and thankfully short, as it's the weak link on the disc. The final track is a nice, quiet indie pop tune in the tradition of the indie-pop classics of the 90s. Overall a pretty good listen. - Paul Silver

GOLD CIRCLES - *Abuse the Magic* (Copter Crash Records, PO Box 6093, Hudson, FL 34667) This is an interesting release from a trio whose sound seems far larger than most traditional three piece line ups. Borrowing equally from Black Sabbath as well as lo-fi aesthetics, this bipolar style of playing makes Abuse the Magic a unique effort, highlighted by guitar/vocalist Steve Five. His vocal range mirrors the ebb and flow of his guitar playing, sounding most impressive on "Cranberry Nothings," "Cherry/Strawberry (Yeah)" and "Cruel". Gold Circles are a mature act, one that is not afraid to experiment with sound and tempo, but never at the expense of the desire to create stomping rock that will appeal to fans from various genres. The lyrics are dark, brooding and unapologetically honest, such as this self-questioning gem: "Is this all I hope to be, with a girl in bed maybe and a bag of weed." The rhythm section of Jason Tarulli and bassist Josh Spainhoward support Five's multidimensional performance with heavy grooves and fluid time changes This is a skilled band that plans on hitting the road shortly. This will be worth checking out. - Rich Quinlan

GOLDFINGER - *Open Your Eyes* (Mojo) Ugh. The ever sound- and scene-shifting Goldfinger rear their ugly heads once again with a new CD that's not worth your money. This time around, Goldfinger have ditched their ska sound which they adopted a few years ago in favor of a political punk sound. What are you guys thinking?!? Poli-punk is over! You have to be an emo band now to get on TV!! Dumbasses! Anyway, this is typical So-Cal punk with a bizzare pro-vegan stance. Good for them - proffering a loud, rawking, meat eating image with your band was so 2001. Here's hoping they starve to death and stop making music. - Oliver Lyons

GOMEZ - *In Our Gun* (Virgin) I am positive that there are people who exist in this world that are waiting with bated breath for this release. I, however, am not one of those people. Gomez is a poppy, British act that connotes musical savvy ranging from the Beatles to Blur, but this is all far too fluffy for my liking. The band kicks things off with the very catchy, albeit overly polished, "Shot Shot" before launching into a wide array of genres, becoming bluesy ("Rex Kramer"), danceable ("In Our Gun" and "Detroit Swing 66") and subtly acoustic on "The Sound of Sounds" and the aptly titled "Ballad of Nice and Easy." To Gomez's credit there is no definitive label that can placed upon the band, as there are touches of folk woven within aural experimentation, and yes, Gomez is a wondrously skilled pop-rock act and the vocal stylings of Ian Ball, Ben Ottewell and Tom Gray are warm and incessantly harmonious. However, for my liking, this is prepackaged, overly commercial glossy rock which acts as ear candy. I can understand wy Virgin would snatch these guys up, for there is a great deal with which to work in terms of looks and musical ability. However, save this for Carson Daly. I'll pass. - Rich Quinlan

GOOD CHARLOTTE - *The Young & The Hopeless* (Epic) Along with Blink & Green Day, Good Charlotte have been given extensive Pop Radio airplay. Like the other two bands, they continue to churn out pop/punk/rock hits. The band still has authenticity with a passion for working- class rock n' roll. On the title cut they sing "These critics and these trust-fund kids try to tell me what punk is /But when I see them on the street they got nothing to say." Along with the afore mentioned bands, I haven't seen them doing any sneaker commercials, so they're pretty much staying true to themselves. "Boys and Girls," "The Anthem," or "Riot Girl" have thoughtful lyrics and power-pop guitars. On "Riot Girl" they talk about Christina who "... hates Britney and loves Social Distortion." Now if I could only find a girl lke that.... There on the Warped Tour this Summer, so judge for yourself. - Phil Rainone

GOOD RIDDANCE - *Symptoms of a Leveling Spirit* (Fat Wreck Chords) Good Riddance was reviewed in Jersey Beat # 71, on a split with Kill Your Idols by Mike Ramek (cool review). It prompted me to seek out their full length. Mike's review didn't disappoint. He used words like "harder edged, & "saccharine-layered melody." (Damn, I should have just copped his review and taken credit, but nah). Good Riddance live up to Mike's review and more! I'm listening to the 6th song already (there's 14 on the disc), and it's solid, non-stop catchy, aggressive, and punk as all hell! Usually, you'll come across some faceless filler by the 3rd or 4th song. Here, on the bands 5th release for Fat Wreck (Good Riddance has been around since 1986), I couldn't find filler if I wanted to. They wear the hearts on their sleeves, and remind us of the true spirit of punk rock, with a social conscious. As with their other releases, proceeds from *Symptoms of a Leveling Spirit* go to charities such as the MS Service Societ y and Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz, CA. - Phil Rainone

The Hives **Photo by Laura Young**

GREEN DAY - *Shenanigans* (Reprise) It's mentioned that these are "rare outtakes, cover songs & other Shenanigans!" After listening to the 14 cuts here, it sounds like this would actually make a solid, coherent album. None of the songs sound dated, or like their fragments of songs. The first 5 songs are pure Green Day. Hard, fast punk rock, with the occasional love song ("Don't Wanna Fall In Love"). Then comes "Espionage." It's a surf tune with horns! You wouldn't think it was Green Day. It really threw me for a loop! One of the covers is "Tired Of Waiting" (Kinks). They pay tribute to the band with an almost note for note rendition, with a little 'garage' thrown in. Recently, I had the chance to interview Darren, the drummer for Goldfinger, and asked if he thought bands like Green Day and Blink 182 had sold out. He said he felt that they didn't sell out, but were getting a big boost from their labels, radio, etc. He backed it up by pointing out that neither of the bands were in TV commercials using their music tohawk sneakers, food, etc. After hearing *Shenanigans*, I tend to agree. There's no formula here, just good music! - Phil Rainone

GREGOR SAMSA – (Iodine Recordings, 1085 Commonwealth Ave., PMB 318, Boston, MA 02215) Kafka's auto-psychological protagonist of vermin fame lends his name to this darkly beautiful, yet sanguine quintet from Richmond, VA. Sometimes a band is so bad that one is reduced to mere comparisons, and other times they are so new and undecipherable as to beckon the same. The latter is the case here. Picture the Aeolean breeze of Julie Cruise and the paired pleadings of Low—all doused in the backdrop of Godspeed You Black Emperor dynamics. Dreamy and foreboding, this 3-song premier EP is a promising little gem that has one begging for more. –Greg Matherly

GRNDNTL BRNDS – *The Great Dumbening* (Vaccination Records, 1501 Powell, Suite H, Emeryville CA 94608) A disconcerting mix of enthusiastic feedback, joyful noise and odd melodies, *The Great Dumbening* is a difficult work to get a handle on. With an instrumental orientation that leans towards recreating the effect of a window breaking or a steam engine exploding into a clash of metal and heat, GrndNtl Brnds confuses the issue by throwing in the unexpected melodic hook or feverish vocal. In the end, however, only the album-closing track, "FM Radio" resonates with any distinctive identity or positive direction. Much of the rest of *The Great Dumbening* plays like so much aural masturbation, GrndNtl Brnds only half again as clever as the band thinks itself to be, a talented foursome wasting its skills with meandering, discordant avant-rock that is neither adventuresome or very original. (www.vacrecs.com) – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

GUTTERMOUTH - *Gusto* (Epitaph) Guttermuoth has the comic irony and wit of bands like They Might Be Giants or Me First & The Gimme Gimme's. On "My Town" they add a cheezy drum machine, and silly lyrics that the B-52's would be proud of! Their set in Camden was better than I expected. They added some cool, comic relief with these songs, and their bouncy, animated stage presence set them apart from some of the more serious bands - a good balance. They sing about real stuff, so I think you'll like their approach to the lyrics and the images they conjure up! I'd be interesting to see what they could do with a cover of something like "The Safety Dance," one of those almost forgotten 80's New Wave off the wall tunes. - Phil Rainone

THE HANGMEN - *We've Got Blood on the Toes of Our Boots* (Acetate Records, 2020 Broadway, 2nd floor, Santa Monica, CA 90404) This starts out as pure, raw rock and roll music, and then descends into the twin hells of 70s cock rock and country rock. At its best, on the up-tempo tunes, it's snotty garage rock with a punk attitude. On the other hand, most of the album is slower arena rock style stuff, and some is almost ballad-like. A couple of the songs border into countrification, always a bad sign. Way too few of the songs fulfull the promise of the first couple of tracks. Skip this. - Paul Silver

HATE - *Cain's Way* (World War III, P. O. Box 4517, Downey, CA 90241) Wow! I reviewed their 2001 release, "Holy Dead trinity" and I thought it was ok but this new album buries that one. They've grown a lot since then musically, the songs are way more dynamic, more hooks, the vocals are very well polished, the drums are fast and precise, and the production is better also. Definitely worth checking out. -- Phil Pinto

HATE THEORY (World War III, PO Box 4517, Downey, CA, 90241) -- Not much to like here, as this Ohio band tries their best to please the Hatebreed crew and the Slipknot kids, and fails miserably in both departments. Generic, down-tuned riffing has a mind-numbing effect after a couple of tracks, but that's the least of Hate Theory's worries. The real sore spot is with the lyrics and vocals. The "I hate everything" manifesto sounds forced and trite, especially when delivered by a singer who is about as real as a garden gnome. - Jason Schreurs

THE HELLACOPTERS - *Cream of the Crap* (Gearhead Records) After listening to these distorted, smokin' guitar solos, and screaming vocals, I went back and read the fine print on the liner notes. All 18 songs are non-album cuts. I was really amazed! Every one is a balls-out garage rock triumph. Blistering numbers like "Thanks for Nothing," "Television Addict," or "I Got a Right" come blasting out of the speakers with reckless abandon. The twin guitar scrapping of the 'Coppters is enough to make you want to break out your MC5 & Stooges records. They also cover the Stones' "Gimme Shelter," with the proper malice and decadence of the original. If this is what they didn't originally put out for the public, than I gotta check out their latest release "High Visibility." If it rocks half as much as "Cream," then it's sure to be a hit! - Phil Rainone

HEY MERCEDES "The Weekend EP" (Vagrant) Although all of this EP's tracks are played at speeds that qualify as post-rock of some sort, the effect here is as cold and bleak as Hey Mercedes' hometown of Milwaukee. Even the production by J Robbins can't save "The Weekend EP" from the pedestrian vocals and nonsense lyrics that band is selling to our poor emo kids. I have this developing theory that all bands should be given either male or female pronouns like in Spanish. In such a scenario, you'd know that Hey Mercedes was more for your girlfriend than for yourself (assuming you're a guy.) Because although I'd dump a CD like this, but I'm going to have to give this one to my girlfriend. She eats this stuff up. -- Johnny Puke

THE HIVES - *Veni Vidi Vicious* (Sire) From Sweden (yeah, Sweden), comes the infectious, catchy (I couldn't resist the pun), greasy, garage/punk sound of The Hives! Sung in English, the band conjures up images of past (Stooges, MC5) & present (Mad Daddys, Tiger Army) garage/ rock bands. The Hives celebrate anarchy in songs like "A Get Together" to "Tear It Apart" or "Hate To Say I Told You So." "Find Another Girl" is almost a romantic ballad, only they give it an upbeat suave tempo, almost like the Dave Clark 5 did with their 60's make-out tune, "Because." From there, The Hives get back to basics. with their take on world affairs with "Statecontrol." They even take the time to impart a little wisdom; "On Knock Knock," lead singer Howlin' Pelle Almqvist tells the listener that 'You're once a failure and twice a fool." Get The Hives new release, then see 'em live if they come around your area, you won't be disappointed! - Phil Rainone

THE HOLY GHOST -- *Broken Record* (Clearly, 314 23rd Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215, clearlyrecords.com) On the floor beside me, my friend Thom realized aloud that the vocalist of Alice And Chains is dead. We got quiet. He spoke up: "ours is a generation chased by demons..." I looked at him. He was joking. He shook his head. We laughed, kept playing our plaintive little songs, couldn't figure out how they mattered, continued, didn't take each crisis too seriously. -Brandon Stosuy

HOME GROWN - *Kings of Pop* (Drive Thru Records) THIS CD SHOULD BE PLAYED LOUD! The music seizes center stage and doesn't let up. Depth, passion, & high energy are stamped into each song. Home Grown has changed their style somewhat since their last release Act Your Age, but without sacrificing their irreverence or exuberance for music. Progressing from playing firehouses (great intimate shows), with the likes of The Youth Ahead, Home Grown recently played the newly expanded Surf & Skate Fest (expanded from 1 to 3 days of merry- making), and will be on this years Vans Warped Tour. They've figured out how to play to the larger crowds, and this CD reflects that change. Powerful and aggressive, the music still relates to that one kid listening to it at home, or in a large concert hall. - Phil Rainone

HOPELESS DREGS OF HUMANITY -*Revolutionary Rock Apocalypse* (Ever Reviled Records, PO Box 1904, New Brunswick, NJ 08903-1904) This is yet another example of where some of the rock/punk/pop music is decent, but the underlying leftist politics make me want to puke. Every time I see a CD picture sleeve with a "Free Mumia" t-shirt on a protester or have to deal with lyrical drivel such as "the state is just the sweet nanny of the upper-class" it confirms why I want to vote Republican. I guess I can say these guys are sincere in their beliefs but then I don't agree with anything they have to say. – Tom Brebric

HOT ROD CIRCUIT - *Sorry About Tomorrow* (Vagrant) If the emo scene was ranked like professional wrestling, bands like The Get Up Kids and Jimmy Eat World would hold the heavyweight belts and bands like The Anniversary, Dashboard Confessional, Piebald, and Hot Rod Circuit would have to settle for the Intercontinental championship belt until their time came when they were ready to challenge the champs for a shot to be one of the big boys. With *Sorry About Tomorrow*, HRC steps up for their chance to be the new king of the emo scene. With glossy production oozing out of every orifice of this disc the album smacks of professionalism and practically screams to be played on top forty radio. Clearly the boys of HRC are pulling out all the stops and laying all their cards on the table- and it shows! Sorry About Tomorrow is one hit single after another. With incredible hooks, amazing vocals and enough heartfelt anthems to appeal to every facet of youth culture, HRC have not only put their best foot forward but their best arm as well. If this album doesn't warrant them at least two rounds with the big guns of the emo scene, the referee must really be blind. - Oliver Lyons

HOT SNAKES -- *Suicide Invoice* (Swami Records, PO Box 620428, San Diego, CA, 92612) – Sure, Drive Like Jehu were a great band — that's indisputable — but as great as they were, their songs did tend to meander. And while the mid-'90s were perhaps the proper time for 8-minute epics, now is the time to get straight to the point. Hot Snakes, featuring key Jehu members Rick Froberg and John Reis (aka Rocket From The Crypt's "Speedo"), nail it on their second album, *Suicide Invoice*. From the opening crunch of "I Hate the Kids," this album is a pure pleasure, bringing us the best of Jehu's ferocity with the melodic beauty of Pitchfork, in which Froberg and Reis started frolicking with emotive punk in the early '90s. Hot Snakes songs like "Gar Forgot His Insulin" and "Who Died" prove that, for Froberg and Reis, the best is always yet to come. – Jason Schreurs

HOT WATER MUSIC - *Caution* (Epitaph) When I first listen to a band, the music is what usually gets my attention. By the second or third listen, the lyrics kick in. On "Caution" I'm getting both the music and lyrics on the first listen. Both are extremely powerful and passionate. It's one of those rare discs where they compliment each other. It's more about substance and skill rather than red hair dye. Twin vocals (Chuck & Chris), the roar of the guitars, and the blistering drumming give the music a unique blend of heartfelt punk and garage rock. - Phil Rainone

I FARM – *Two Selected Works* (Traffic Violation Records, PO Box 772, East Setauket, NY, 11733) *Two Selected Works* is a re-release of 2000's *Sincerely, Robots* and songs from a split 7" with Operation: Cliff Claven. In my previous review of these songs, I complained about I Farm's incessantly jerky sound, something that bewildered me away from fully enjoying this band. Well, despite a slightly deeper appreciation for their semi-organized temper tantrums, the feeling of too much, too fast remains. I Farm needs to cut back drastically on their caffeine intake, and maybe go for long walks on the beach before every practice. Fans of spastic, teen-angst hardcore will dig deep on this, and the songs from the split 7" are a nice bonus. – Jason Schreurs

THE INEVITABLE BREAKUPS – "No Wonder You're So Beautiful" EP (80 Mulberry St. #31, New York, NY 10013) Bouncy power-pop permeates this self-released CD EP. It's catchy and infectious stuff. The music is tight, and the vocals are crystal clear. In some ways this stuff reminds me of the great power-pop of the early 80s, but this is no retro nostalgia band. This is a thoroughly modern band singing songs about love and loss, as you might expect from a band with the name they do. Oh, the cover graphics of this disc are perfect, too, featuring a send-up of the "Please don't litter" signs, but with a girl sillouhette tossing a heart into the trash can while the boy sillouhette stands on the other side of it. Highlight tracks: the operner, "Justine," is sort of Descendents-ish, almost bordering on pop-punk but not quite, and the sixth track, "Waiting," reminds me of mid-period Smoking Popes, mainly for the vocal quality, I think. Good stuff! - Paul Silver

Hot Snakes **Photo by Shawn Scallen**

THE INFINITE X's (Chainsaw Records, PO Box 1151, Olympia, WA, 98507-1151). Super-catchy pop songs hop and bounce along much to my delight. Donna Dresch (formally of Team Dresch) and Jody Bleyle (of Hazel fame) bring a certain musical maturity and pop sophistication to the table. The X's also feature former members of the Automaticians and a guest appearance by Richard Balayut of Versus (Richard is also the producer of the record). At times this release is reminiscent of Magnapop (yeah, remember Magnapop?) while the X's could share the same stage with Sleater-Kinney, perhaps as the headliner on the bill. My personal favorites are "A Funny Place to Start to Cry," and "Welcome to the Show." While much of the "punk" underground continues to be a bland, all-male sausage party, the estrogen-loaded spirit of the Infinite X's will have you doing cartwheels on the lawn. -David Gracon

INSTANT DEATH -- *New Evil Vibe* (Chocodog, PO Box 700, Ringoes NJ 08551) Instant Death are a legendary New Brunswick band composed of Scott Byrnes on drums and vocals, and Ween bassist Dave Dreiwitz on bass and vocals. This is not what the techno/dance music kids have in mind when they talk about drums 'n' bass, though. Basically, this is big dumb rock, with simple melodies and jokey lyrics. It's scary to remember that back in the mid-Nineties, New Brunswick was full of gimmicky big-rock bands like this (and about three or four of them covered "The Enabler," as I recall.) Like most joke bands, this is funny for about five minutes, and then it's just annoyingly stupid and one-dimensional. And since there are 70+ minutes of music and 27 songs (plus uncredited bonus tracks!) here, you get a lot more Instant Death than anyone needs. – Jim Testa

INTERPOL -- *Turn On The Bright Lights* (Matador) These young New Yorkers have an elegant fashion sense and an all-too-obvious affinity for their influences – specifically, angsty British post-punk acts like Joy Division and the Smiths. You might as well throw in Sonic Youth too, since those aforementioned Brits tended to be post-punk minimalists whereas the guitarists in Interpol each command at least a dozen different effects pedals, generating a kaleidoscopic array of pings, chimes, swooshes, and jangles under Paul Banks' droning vocals. Most reviews say Interpol owe a bit too much to their heroes; that really doesn't bother me, since I never listened to Joy Division or The Smiths all that much anyway. What doesn't work for me is this: These lads suffer the same shortcoming as fellow New Yorkers (and Luna Lounge alumni) Longwave. There's but a short gap between psychedelic and soporific, and for me, they cross it. Angsty, moody, jangly... fine. Dreary, shoegazery, boring... No, thank you. – Jim Testa

DREW ISLEIB *Sounds Through The Walls* (Ernest Jenning Record Co.) After his collegiate pop band Velour 44 broke up, Drew Isleib pursued his graduate education from New Jersey to Boston to Denver, but kept writing and recording songs in a home studio. This album collects 13 of those songs, all written, performed, and recorded by Isleib, showcasing his supple vocals and strummed acoustic guitar, with tasteful fillips of organ, programmed drums, and other instrumentation . His muse lies somewhere between the modern school of reflective pop (Pete Yorn, Wilco, Jeff Magnum) and old-school folk strummers like Paul Simon. It's pleasant, tuneful, and earnest enough; I just have a problem handing over 36 minutes of my life to "pleasant." So let me take this opportunity to digress on what I look for in a singer-songwriter. Whether it's a joker like Loudon Wainwright, a barfly like John Prine, a cornball like John Mellencamp, or a local indie-eccentric like Tris McCall, the great singer-songwriters invest their music with gobs of their own personality and fill their lyrics with a specificity that's sorely missing here – people, places, things. If you're going to write, write about something. I really don't care how the morning dew makes you feel rosy or how much you miss some idyllic place or person that you never name in your songs. Drew spent the summer touring America, hitting truckstops, coffeehouses, and tiny clubs, soaking up life in the hinterlands and meeting a small army of people from all walks of life. When he releases a set of songs about those experiences, I'll be ready to listen. -- Jim Testa

THE JACK MCCOYS - *All The Weeping Cameras* (AmBiguous City Records) Boston's Jack McCoys are a weird bunch. They are a rock band that does not rock, a pop combo that eschews hooks and choruses. In an era when barking frat boys dominate rock, the Jack McCoys' Matt Savage almost seems to inhale his vocals; his voice runs the gamut from a whisper to a murmur, even on the crescendos. Add to that laid-back jazzy drum parts (I dare you to find a backbeat anywhere on this disc!) and sinewy, intertwined lead guitars, with sparse, ethereal melodies, and you've got a band that makes Guided By Voices sound like the Sex Pistols. Singer Savage and guitarist Dan Madri may be familiar to Jersey Beat readers as former members of Boston's Godboy, a pseudo-acoustic pop ensemble that veered toward the goofy. The Jack McCoys, on the other hand, are as earnest as a prairie campfire, with lyrics that read like pages torn from a poet's notebook . There are familiar elements wafting through these songs – hints of country, soul, even pop – but mostly, this is elegant, quirky, off-the-beaten-path stuff that will take a few listens to sink in. - Jim Testa

WANDA JACKSON - *Wanda Jackson & Rockin' with Wanda* (Capitol) I first heard Wanda Jackson on a Rhino Records (it featured Robert Gordon & The Blasters. Rhino just released The Blasters Anthology), Rockabilly comp. What got my attention was her assertive, rough/sweet voice (she was about 18 years old). "Let's Have A Party" (included here), was such a rave! It made you want to get up, call your friends over, and have an all-night bash. Besides other flat-out rockers like "Fujiyama Mama," "Let Me Go, Lover!" & "Money Honey," this 2 disc rockabilly romp also shows Wanda's softer side. Heartbreakers like "Did You Miss Me?," "Just Call Me Lonesome," & "Makebelieve." Both discs include bonus tracks that are mostly B-sides of her singles that add more depth to her career. If you just wanna blow off some steam, or just had your heart broken, check out these tunes. This is the real deal! - Fireball Phil Rainone

JESUSEATER – EP (Deathwish, 432 Morris Ave. Providence, RI 02906) The music here is as great and as eye-popping as the name; four boisterous, crunchy pieces of thick guitar rock led by the unapologetic style of vocalist Shawn Brown. The songs get progressively more ferocious, hitting a climax with the blunt force trauma of "Your Airstream Future. " This is a punishing song whose power-saw guitar playing cuts through the intensity of Brown's vocals as he bellows "I was born on railroad tracks, I lost myself and never found my found my way back." The closing refrain of "we are the gods," should not be treated lightly, as this is a band ready to assault the timidity of modern rock. "Longball" and "On a Clear Day" are other examples of the band's ability to find a balance between sonic fury and well constructed, rhythmic riffs. This is an unabashed thrashing by a tightly wound band that should, if there is any justice, be very well known by the time you read this. - Rich Quinlan

JETS TO BRAZIL - *Perfecting Loneliness* (Jade Tree) Jets to Brazil attained nearly instantaneous underground acceptance upon their formation five years ago, and while the band has been worthy of past praise, they have released their most brilliant work to date with *Perfecting Loneliness*. When attempting to establish a sense of longing, pain and self-doubt, no instrument seems to have the impact of the piano, and Jets to Brazil liberally utilize its tones throughout the record, never with greater effectiveness than on the epic closer, "Rocket Boy." With most efforts going well beyond the standard three minute pop song in length, you are allowed to hear a band supremely confident in their abilities while also providing enough time to fully develop and explore mature themes. While listening to Perfecting Loneliness, it is clear that the majority of the work revolves around individuals who are still searching for answers and meaning, but there is never a sense of complaint or self-hatred. Rather, the lyrics range in scope from sarcastic to heart-wrenching, with perfectly executed, elegant musicianship supporting them. Akin to the most recent Get Up Kids record, Jets To Brazil are a band who are not afraid of growing up and addressing more complex issues.

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"Autumn Walker," "Psalm," "Disgrace" and the title track are just a handful of anthems which anchor the collection. There is not a desire to fill every second of the disc with a hook, either. The band understands that occasionally, sparse playing can be as equally intense and effective as frenetic pacing, as the warm "Further North" proved. This is a career defining release from a band who have truly discovered their potential. -Rich Quinlan

THE JETSET DOMINO - *What Am I Doing To Me* (HYPERLINK "http://www.jetsetdomino.com" www.jetsetdomino.com) The picture of Bloom County's Steve Dallas located on the back of the disc initially raised my hopes about this band, but unfortunately, the music quickly disappointed me. As music becomes easier to record, produce and distribute, the number of mediocre bands is rapidly rising and you can count the Jetset Domino among them. The opening track set an ironic tone for the disc as "One Trick Pony" sums up this act. Each of the songs came across as repetitive and under developed as the guitars seemed thin and the vocals of Mike simply did not carry enough force. To their credit, the band has a well defined sense of humor, as exemplified by "Kevin Spacey and the Virgin Hamburger" and "I'm Idaho." Some of the material was recorded 1999 and maybe the Jetset Domino have matured and refined their sound in the time since this primal piece, but this is a very unpolished effort that, while possessing some pop melodies, simply will not hold your attention. - Rich Quinlan

DAVID JOHANSEN & THE HARRY SMITHS – *Shaker* (Cheskey Records, Box 1268 Radio City Station, NYC 10101) From his days as the singer for the seminal New York Dolls through his regrettable turn as the clownish Buster Poindexter, David Johansen has covered a great deal of ground for a vocalist of his limited talents. Here, on his second outing with the first-class blues band The Harry Smiths, Johansen turns in 14 acoustic blues covers, much like the real Harry Smith's famed anthology of American folk music. Johansen and his band cover classic artists like Mississippi John Hurt, Muddy Waters, and Lightnin' Hopkins, as well as neo-bluegrass duo and "American Gothic" lookalikes Gillian Welch and David Rawlings. Blues fans may dig this a lot or be really put off by Johansen's brash, atonal vocals. – Johnny Puke

CALVIN JOHNSON – *What Was Me* (K Records, Box 7154, Olympia WA 98507) Calvin Johnson is a true underground pioneer whose DIY spirit has led him from publishing a music zine (*Sub Pop*) to starting an anti-corporate record label (K Records) to fronting a number of bands, including Beat Happening and the Halo Benders. Johnson earned a solid street rep for his work in organizing the 1991 International Pop Underground Festival that featured over 50 bands, including Fugazi, L7, Mecca Normal and the Fastbacks and he has also worked as an engineer and producer with folks like Built To Spill and Robyn Hitchcock. His influence on the early-nineties Seattle scene is often unheralded, Johnson's artistic innocence and championing of the indie aesthetic providing a moral compass for Northwest bands. Somehow during the twenty-year span of his music career, however, Johnson has never released a solo album. *What Was Me* rectifies this situation, Johnson's first of many planned solo efforts offering fans of the enigmatic artist a deeper look into his creative soul. Culled from an archive of demo tapes squirreled away somewhere in Olympia, *What Was Me* is a stark look at Johnson's talents as a songwriter, ten songs with just guitar, and sometimes Calvin leaves the guitar at home and delivers the material a capella. Johnson's broken-glass baritone takes some getting used to, but once you get past his vocal peculiarities you'll find a solid collection of highly-personal songs, Johnson an unabashed romantic with an optimistic and rose-colored view of the world. "Ode To St. Valentine" is a wonderful duet with K labelmate Mirah, sans instrumentation with lovely interplay between their two voices. "Lightnin' Rod For Jesus" is a gospel-tinged duet with Beth Ditto while the title cut is a folksy, self-penned epitaph that spotlights Johnson's skills as a wordsmith and as a minimalist performer. In an industry overflowing with young punks trying to grab a bit of DIY credibility, none of them come close to Calvin Johnson, an obscure talent who has truly done it "his way" every time. (www.krecs.com) – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

JOY (Daniel_madri@hotmail.com) A mostly-acoustic side-project of Dan Madri and Matt Savage (of Boston's Jack McCoys), Joy may just be the perfect vehicle for Savage's papery vocals and Madri's penchant for what I can best describe as pretty dissonance. The stripped down arrangements never overpower the vocals, which at their loudest rarely rise above a conversational tone. I wish I could just say "yeah, a really pretty CD, pick it up," but alas, even the most accessible tracks here still sound like druids chanting in the forest. "Catchy" just is not in this duo's vernacular, and Joy - like their louder band, the Jack McCoys – remains an acquired taste, something a little outside the mainstream for those who like their music challenging rather than soothing. – Jim Testa

KEEPSAKE - *Black Dress In A B Movie* (Fearless Records) Keepsake is a band that would give a little more depth to a Surf & Skate or Warped Tour. Songs like "Violent Love" or "Ticket to Russia" are solid tunes that are boiled down to the essence of pop/punk. Good lyrics that describe life's highs and lows, coupled with a big, open guitar sound. They also add some synth. to the mix, which gives Keepsake's music a deeper sound. They also take time to include two ballads ("A Raindance Narrative," & "American Fight"). Don't confuse these guys with a band like Dashboard Confessional. Keepsake's music comes from the heart and soul, whereas Dashboard is pompous and superficial. Keepsake is playing at Krome in Sayreville in Oct. This would be one of those shows you won't want to miss! - Phil Rainone

KID SNIPER - *Landlocked* (High School Champion, PO Box 86003, 670 Bloor St., W Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6G 1L0) *Landlocked*, named after a Beach Boys record that never saw the light of day, is a glorious sampling of sounds and textures, oscillating from the deeply visceral to the direct. There is nary a dull moment here, as the record hits its climatic conclusion by covering "Moonshake" from the uncompromising Can. There is clearly and homage paid to the noise-pop genre of songwriter Jonathan Bunce's former band, Toronto's A Tuesday Weld, best heard on "Hard Science" and "Timepiece." I noticed that the press released declared that this record should be heard in one sitting, treated as a near concept album. This is usually a red flag for me, but I was pleasantly surprised to find that this instruction is true. The songs here meld into one another, effortless flowing from one experimental twist to the next, generating a cosmic sense of adventurousness. I did not adore everything here, but to Kid Sniper's credit, nothing hangs around long enough to grow tiresome; as the disc alternates tempo and depth with incredible proficiecy. What impressed me the most was the fact that bass and synth filled the roles normally held by guitars, generating an instrumentation that breaks away from more acceptable indie ideologies. In all, Kid Sniper have released a sharp album of biting pop with an edge. - Rich Quinlan

KNIVES OUT – *Heartburn EP* (Deathwish, 432 Morris Ave. Providence, RI 02906) This is about as bruising as hardcore can be; a walloping six tracks slamming into each other, culminating in a furious listening experience which clocks in staggeringly at under ten minutes. Within these scant moments the listener is exposed to raw emotion as vocalist Nicholas Hans details hurtful urges and emotions on "Horseshoes and Handgrenades" ("Depression seems like second nature/And don't think I'm not blaming you") and "Broken Night ("Have you ever killed for fun?/No? I'd like to try someday"). Knives Out are a pummeling act of relentless hardcore, anchored by the guitar playing of Joshua Agran and Jeffery Ziga. While some traditional hardcore topics such as struggling financially and the evils of the corporate world are explored on "Pay It Up" and "Noose For a Necktie" respectively, it is Hans' cathartic ravings over a lost romance that most stood out for me. "Love Lost in Lies" is a soaringly cynical take on marriage which lambastes the theory hat love is eternal. The frustrated eulogy for a deceased junkie, "Pins N' Needles," completes this darkly personal record. With members of American Nightmare and Boy Sets Fire, Knives Out are one of the most promising hardcore existing right now. Get this, unless you are easily frightened. - Rich Quinlan

KNOCK DOWN (Youngblood Records, 217 W.Main St., Ephrata, PA 17522) Though the term 'heavy' is often misused, there is certainly no more appropriate an adjective that could be used to describe the sound emanating from the self titled Youngblood debut from Knock Down. Heralding fond memories of an amalgam of brutal, seminal NYHC, from early "Blood, Sweat, And No Tears" era Sick Of It All, to '87 demo-era Breakdown, and a fair helping of rhythmic mid-era Madball, as well, the band uncompromisingly pummels through the seven songs here with unsettling visceral precision. A freight train of tempo-shifts, on-the-dime drumming, and shrapnel coated vocal spewage commences in a manner that is as forceful as it is forthright. Chugging, walloping chord progressions complement the simple, terse yet defiant lyrical drive quite well. This is a stellar debut, paying testament to one of the finest eras in hardcore with an uncanny verve that resurrects the immediacy of that urban, street-wise feel with aplomb. –Mike Ramek

KUNG FU KILLERS - *Game of Death* (TKO Records - 3126 West Cary St. #303, Richmond, VA, 23221) - Retro hardcore crossover punk with spazzy vocals and guitar riffs on speedballs. This six song EP seems like it's over before it starts; a welcome relief from bands who cram 38 songs onto a disc (all of which sound exactly the same). Kung Fu Killers throw in a couple of cover tunes for good measure, doing their best not to slaughter tracks by Misfits and Black Flag, and barely getting out alive. Fans of late '80s skatecore and punk will get a twinge of reminiscence, and may even think fondly upon these old school madmen. - Jason Schreurs

Matt Savage of Joy

Land Speed Record

AKE TROUT - *Another One Lost* (SNS Records) The best way to describe this disc is "trance-rock." It's very rock oriented, with guitar/bass/drum arrangements, but there's also drum & bass & synth and a very spacey feel to the music. The vocals are a bit too much like a cross between U2's Bono and Sting for my taste, and most of the tracks have little in the way of variety to keep up interest. But in small doses, especially on the instrumental tracks, it's interesting stuff. - Paul Silver

LAND SPEED RECORD – *Good Housekeeping* (amBiguous City Records) "I am on a mission from God," shrieks Charlie Jamison, in one of LSR's most memorable songs. And he may just be right. This Baltimore quartet's career has been a jihad against complacent, predictable indie-rock. The band's songs – fueled by Jamison's bizarrely original lyrics, frenetic riffs, and a jumpy, rock-solid rhythm section – poke and prod the edges of sanity, with song titles like "Robotic Pornographic Queen," "Alicia Silverstone Shame Spiral," and "I Am Sharon Tate." But beneath the weirdness lies the realization that even the mundane is weird too ; "Interoffice Copulation" turns fax machines and photocopiers into instruments of a sex fetish, while "Personal Safety" suggests that even the most idyllic white-picket fence home in America is still a snakepit of danger and fear. Jamison most often sings in the third person, from the viewpoint of the totally deranged, with offbeat chord changes and herky-jerky rhythms that accentuate the oddness. Insanity has never felt so good. This CD presents eight new tracks and another 11culled from earlier, out-of-print LSR albums and EP's, and is absolutely recommended as a vital addition to your collection if you're even the least bit interested in indie rock that dares to veer from the mainstream. – Jim Testa

LAST CONSERVATIVE – *These In-Between Times* (LC Music Group, PO Box 213, Lancaster, NY, 14086) It's good, I guess, to hear that alternative rock is not dead, but by the sounds of Last Conservative, it might be slipping back into a coma. Five of the first eight songs are outright ballads, the remaining three qualifying as ballads in the "power" category. The songs on this album meander in college rock dullsville and are horribly hobbled by TJ Zindle's Geddy Lee-like geek vocals. Jesus, I'd even take the Lemonheads over this. – Jason Schreurs

THE LAWRENCE ARMS - *Apathy and Exhaustion* (Fat Wreck Cords) This disc has some amazing energy in the music, coupled with outspoken lyrics. Defiance and desperation come through on songs like "The First Eviction Notice" and "Brick Wall Views." Not your average pop/punk band, The Lawrence Arms have the musical firepower and maturity of bands like The Bouncing Souls or Goldfinger. Here's a band who's CD will get you interested in seeing them live. Not many bands are able to do that these days. -Phil Rainone

LAYMEN TERMS - *Since Last December* (Soda Jerk Records) This CD has an inventive, pop punk/emo groove going on in the music. The lyrics deal with everyday life ("17," "Waiting for You"), but they're not whiny. Laymen Terms brings together fat hooks ("Tired Minds"), and energetic vocals (Andy Tanner). The songs are original, and the band takes their time, drawing you into the music and lyrics. They redefine the genre with a sold rhythm section that will remind you of early 90's alt/rock. A band with depth and something to say. -Phil Rainone

LES SANS CULOTTES - Faux Realism (Aeronaut Records) Do you like 1960s French psychedelic pop music? If so, then you're gonna love Les Sans Culottes, whose name translates to "those without undergarments). This is authentic, sparkly 60s style pop music, all sung in French. It's so realistic that it's frightening. The big question I have, is this supposed to be parody/kitsch? Or is this band serious about this sort of music? If it's the former, great job, guys! But if it's the latter, uh, the flower power generation disappeared a long time ago, people. - Paul Silver

LITTLE T & ONE TRACK MIKE – "The Red Barn Sessions" EP (www.littletandonetrackmike.com) So let's say you sign to a major label and your video gets on TRL – only MTV starts showing it before your CD's even in the stores, and stops showing it before anyone can buy the damn thing. So what next? Some bands just give up, others plow on with another next major label dud (assuming they're even allowed to make one)... and then there's NJ's Little T & One Track Mike. When the hip/pop combo realized their Lava/Atlantic deal wasn't going to make them rich and famous, they went back to the drawing board and reinvented themselves as what I can best describe as "jug-band hip-hop pop ," still relying on the abundant charms of rapper Little T but recasting their songs with lots of acoustic instruments (guitars, banjo, harmonica, recorder) and percussion. Little T remains a total charmer, with his self-deprecating wit and nimble emcee skills leading the band through tunes like "The Mystery Song" (about a mystery girl friend) and "The Morning I Woke Up Hard" (a hilarious tune about every boy's best friend, the a.m. boner.) And for old-time fans, there's a new version of "Dead Man (Waiting To Happen.)" None of this is likely to get them back on TRL anytime soon, but it's entertaining as hell. And it's good to see Little T & One Track Mike back to doing what they do best, conquering the world one fan at a time. – Jim Testa

LIVE NOT ON EVIL – *Lucky Stiff* (1119 Marlborough St., Philadelphia, PA, 19125) – This is pretty cool. It's got a horror rock, Misfits vibe but doesn't sound dated or by-the-numbers at all. Like the Misfits used to, Live Not on Evil have a great singer in Rob Windfelder, but he's not a Danzig-alike at all, which is a neat surprise. Sometimes the band dip a bit too deep into radio-friendly industrial rock sounds, like an evil version of Filter or something, but mostly this is trashy, thrashy horror punk done with a reserved confidence and obvious talent. Yes, black clothes and greasy hair are featured prominently, but so are loud guitar ambience and creepy lyrics. – Jason Schreurs

LO BALL - *The Demo Years* (thetalenthouse@aol.com) Unfortunately we missed Lo-Ball's set on the Warped Tour in Camden (there were a ton of bands). The buzz we were hearing after their show wasn't hype. This 5 song demo backs up the bands aggressive, hum along, somewhat pissed off punk rock. Like the Runaways and Ronettes before them, they can smile seductively in your face, while putting out their cigarette in the palm of your hand (and you'll like it)! High energy music like "Free Radical," "Rockstar," and "The Warped Song," are tight, fun, and on the money. The latter song (about The Warped Tour), beats the fuck out of Blink's homogenized "Rock Show." The song is more about the bands, and punk as a lifestyle, rather than a passing fad. Lo-Ball wears their hearts on their sleeves and you'll find the proof in their music. - Phil Rainone

LO-HI - *Say It More* (Tiger Style Records, 149 Wooster St. 4th Fl New York, NY 10012) All right kids; all of you who are currently gorging yourselves on the White Stripes, the Hives, the Vines and, inexplicably, the Strokes, stop what you are doing and go find this. Say It More, the sophomore effort from Lo-Hi, is true garage rock; rangy, gritty rock and roll that comes at you without hype but will leave you wondering why you have not heard more this band. Unfortunately, the reason why you have not heard more is because the band is ostensibly an off shoot of Boss Hog. Boss Hog drummer Hollis Queens steps in front of the mic and is an undeniable star, as Martin Owens (drummer, member of Speedball Baby), guitarist/Boss Hog member Jens Jurgensen and bassist Justin Holub create a rough and ready ensemble. Kicking off with "Runaround," Queens has a voice of controlled fury and good natured fun, as heard on the tribute to Lucille Ball and I Love Lucy, appropriately titled "Lucy." I loved nearly every second of this, with only he closing "Little Plant" sounding a bit forced and unnecessary. However, "Dig Thru," "Light Up" and the title track are all hard edged guitar gems that should propel this band to the forefront of the latest movement which has people craving for real, non-glossy rock. Borrowing scaled down metal riffs, punk rock snarls and catchy harmonies, Say It More is for those who want their music loud, earnest and fierce. Get this now. - Rich Quinlan

LOLLIPOP LUST KILL – *My So Called Knife* (Artemis Records, 130 Fifth Ave., 7th Floor, New York, NY, 10011) – Disposable nu-metal pap from these Toledo, Ohio goofs who can't even afford silly costumes or face paint. Instead, they claim that the scariest people in the world are the ones that look normal, like you or me. Sure guys, let's see how normal you look when the cash starts rolling in and you can afford some latex masks. Based on the quality of My So Called Knife, the money won't be flowing anytime soon, unless the nu-metal market is open for yet another Drowning Pool/Mudvayne/[insert bad nu-metal band name here] sound-a-like band. Actually, wait, maybe these guys will be the next big thing — this is just awful enough to make them the new stars of "modern rock." – Jason Schreurs

LOS OLVIDADOS – *Listen to This* (Alternative Tentacles Records, PO Box 419092, San Francisco, CA, 94141-9092) – This record by the seminal San Jose skate punk band is the second in a series of skate punk re-releases being done by Alternative Tentacles. Los Olvidados are probably best known for their appearances on MRR's "Not So Quiet on the Western Front" and the early Thrasher "Skate Rock" compilations. The 12 songs collected here represent the recorded material of the band between 1980-83. It's pretty killer stuff, similar in attitude to Minor Threat or early Black Flag, but with that definite SoCal surfer dude vibe. The vocals are mostly screamed and the playing is tight, even the mid-tempo change-up songs sound nice and raw without being too sloppy. Watch for other entries in this skate rock series from Free Beer and Drunk Injuns. – Jason Schreurs

MAD HAPPY - *Feel Good Music. . . For the Broke Middle Class* (Bar None) I frequently say that variety is the spice of life. Well, variety most certainly also qualifies as a necessary piquant spice which good, solid, satisfyingly eclectic pop-rock albums are made of. This flavorsome aural potpourri – the latest vehicle of longtime NJ scenester Mike Ill - stands out as a stellar example of this sweetly diverse recipe for a surefire tasty sonic stew. Each track its own terrifically tuneful territory: The lovely, lulling "Magdeline" opens things on a divinely mellow note, "Not Jealous of Angels" goes for broke boppin' with mucho muscular elan. "The Rock and Roll" gets down and funky with that hard-diggin' hip-hop beat, the springy "Mechanical Monkey" vigorously works an amazingly elastic melody to groovy glory, and so on. The finely harmonic arrangements sprinkle delicious dapples of jaunty guitar, gorgeously breezy clarinet, fluid bass, and strong, kickin' drums like so much scrumptious chocolate on an already eminently munchable cake. The robust vocals, pristine production, excitingly energetic playing, admirably brash sensibility, biting lyrics (which address down-at-the-heels blue collar angst with bracing acuity,) and an overall sense of infectiously ambitious shoot-for-the-moon enthusiasm secure this one's sterling status as a total on-target winner. – Joe Wawyrzniak

MAN ALIVE! – *Hearts, Hands and Mind* (Universal Warning Records) – I mistook this band for Man Afraid when I first saw their name, but it's uncanny how similar the two bands sound. Unfortunately, all of my old 7" records are long gone, so I can't check to see if Man Afraid, like Man Alive!, were also from Denver, CO. For many days, I will obsess over this lack of confirmation and be unable to erase that hint of a doubt that this could be the same band with a slight name change. I worry about these kind of things. Man Alive! throw in ska parts in hefty doses to the songs, which helps me to come to terms with the fact this could indeed be a different band. The choppy, screamy hardcore with snotty screaming and gallopy beats puts me back in head scratch mode, though. If Crimpshine were twice as fast and twice as snotty, they would have sounded a lot like Man Alive! (and also Man Afraid). High praise, I know, but it's really refreshing to hear fast hardcore with lots of melody done well in this day and age. Anyone who remembers Man Afraid, please contact me so I can sleep at night. – Jason Schreurs

MAN WILL DESTROY HIMSELF - *Consume, Be Silent, Die* (Extremely Baked Records, 3028 Leonard St, Raleigh, NC 27607) An unimpressive melding of attempted old school ripping and wholly lackluster 'rock' riffage intertwines on this fairly forgettable effort from Man Will Destroy Himself. While a slight late '80s crust edge surfaces amid the straight forward chord blasts and spiraling showmanship, the output here is ultimately pretty dull, with a sound that seems to be overwrought with an overtly accessible 'rock out' edge that negates the surly influences otherwise present. Dogmatic critiques of conformity and the pitfalls of consumerist culture, coupled with middling musical prowess, and culminating in a tragically botched Discharge cover prove forgettable. –Mike Ramek

MAN WITHOUT PLAN - *Get Right* (Immigrant Sun Records PO BOX 150711 Brooklyn, NY 11215) Following a full length on Creep that showcased a proficient, though at times uneven and muddled, blend of echoing harmonic inclinations, and jagged, brutal dissonance, Man Without Plan truly come into their own on their latest full length. Hardcore punk that balances its spiraling, frenetically building riff constructions and rhythmic musicianship with rousing shards of sing-along melodic inclinations that at times recall the past exploits of Virginia based Inquisition, and the loose, unconditionally chaotic saccharine fray exhibited by the likes of early East Bay legends Crimpshrine. Heart breaking layers of jarring sound seamlessly intertwine, resonate, and fade away with a distinct fury and marked creativity all too uncommon in the world of hardcore and punk. –Mike Ramek

MANOWAR - *Warriors of the World* (Metal Blade). Oh boy, can you hear the sirens and horns being blown? Can you see the troops being gathered for the war? That means one thing: MANOWAR has a new album out!!! The kings of Power Metal return after a six-year hiatus to unleash their ninth studio album "Warriors of the World". I think the events of 9/11 really did a number on these guys cause they're really full of rage and pride and the same time, and ready to take on the world with their brand of Metal. The album's opener "Call to Arms" is pretty rockin', then the next 6 tracks are laid back with lots of orchestrated parts, and minimal drum work. Then tracks 8 through 11 pick you up again, and the album gains momentum as each song goes on. So it's a journey through the Metal world of Manowar. Crank it up! "All Men Play On Ten". - Phil Pinto

BILL MCGARVEY – *Tell Your Mother* (Good Thief Music, PO Box 764, Hoboken NJ 07030) What separates Bill McGarvey from many of his contemporaries is his willingness to embrace his inner Paul McCartney. There's a smile-inducing sweetness and lightness to his songs that's hard to resist. The lilting "Tell Your Mother" swings like vintage Nilsson, while even a sad song like "5 O'Clock Hero" (about the inevitable dreariness of a middle-class marriage) has a catchy bridge that underlies is Harry Chapin solemnity. *Tell Your Mother* is recommended for anyone who enjoys well crafted, well written, intelligent and tuneful pop songs. Or for that matter, anyone who just likes to smile while listening to music. – Jim Testa

ME - *Armorizin'* (www.merock.com) Wow, what a strange, unique, beautiful, ugly, smooth, grating combination of musical styles and ethnicities. I hear eastern music, I hear Laibach-style grandeur, I hear glam metal, I hear Love & Rockets influence, and more. Damn, this is just a CD single, so there's only the one song, but there's also a video clip of the song available on the special limited edition of the disc. Cool. - Paul Silver

MEGAXBRAND - Halogen (megaxbrand.com) Essentially this is a one man show; Lester James is the guitarist and brains behind Megaxbrand, and frankly, I am not sure if his brains were too much or too limited for my taste. Not much here jumped out at me, as I felt like I was being exposed to one man's unfettered outtakes from a basement recording session. There are a few promising nuggets - "Strawberry Dresses" and "My Brother's Got the Stereo" - to name a couple, but much of this is a collision of ideas, influences and experimentation that resulted in a whirlwind record, 40-plus minutes of guitar noise accented by moments of distilled quiet, but it was ultimately too undisciplined to be truly memorable. Lester James has some meaty riffs here, and there are potentially great song foundations being laid, but Halogen needs refinement and sharpening, and many a few more lyrics to help things out as well. I wanted to like this, for the smashing together of rock and heavy beats can occasionally be exhilarating. Unfortunately, Megaxbrand may have too many dangerous side effects for my diet. - Rich Quinlan

MEKONS - *OOOH!* (Quarterstick Records, PO Box 25342, Chicago, IL 60625) I was eccstatic when I saw this album in my latest batch of CDs for review. The Mekons have been around forever, it seems. Well, 25 years, actually. But they were around for the early days of punk and have survived to this day (nay, thrived) not by living in their past, but by constantly reinventing themselves and innovating musically. This latest album is full of ethnic folk and gospel influence, if you can believe that. It certainly is difficult to describe the music, really. Usually a review would try to compare the band to other bands out there the reader may be familiar with. But the Mekons are so unique and blaze musical trails to such an extent, that there's nothing against which they can be compared. Oh, all right! Maybe they sometimes have hints of the Pogues on this album. Definitely Pogues fans would enjoy this album alot. Highly recommended! - Paul Silver

THE META-MATICS - *The Complete Discography* (Troubleman Unlimited, 16 Willow St., Bayonne, NJ 07002, www.troubleman.com) Un-fucking-believable! Where did these guys come from, where did they go, and why did they go so fast? Meta-matics are a band that formed for a short time in Washington, D.C. back in the mid-90s. They combine the intensity of Fugazi with the over-the-top manic sound of Nation of Ulysses or their successor, the Make-Up. Add in a healthy dose of free jazz a-la the Flying Luttenbachers and you'll get an idea of the truly unique sound of this phenominal band. It's raw, intense, stuff. Recommended. - Paul Silver

MIDGET JESUS - *What Would Midget Jesus Do?* (www.midgetjesus.com) Despite a great name, the music of Boston's Midget Jesus came up a little short in my book. (Sorry for that pun, could not be avoided). While borrowing musical cues from indie-pop acts of the early Nineties, Midget Jesus plays jangly, lighthearted fare that sounded painfully dated and void of any punch. Led by David Fieldhouse, much of *What Would Midget Jesus Do?* is simplistic, forgettable pop rock with a few sparing moments of fun ("Coffee," "8 Feet High"), but ultimately, it sounds like a tribute band to a time period too recent to deserve such blatant imitation. The brief opening tracks, "Money" and "Excited," borrow almost exclusively from Archers of Loaf and Small, only without the underlying sense of aggression or the unpredictable explosions that those bands provided. Sadly, the only truly memorable aspect of this disc was a very cool photo of Lee Marvin from his 1967 film *Point Blank*. However, one cannot crucify Midget Jesus (sorry again), for the band has been playing together for less than a year, and there is a foundation of good intentions here. They simply need to expand upon an already tired formula and avoid the stagnation that seems to afflict this disc. Maybe Midget Jesus can move beyond the uneven beginning and resurrect a promising career. - Rich Quinlan

MIDNIGHT THUNDER EXPRESS (Empty US Records, P. O. Box 12034, Seatlle, WA 98012). Your basic good time rock n' roll band delivering a very bluesy album with dirty, raw vocals rounding out the sound. Ten tracks with no electronics, no samples, just guitars, drums, bass, and vocals to make you rock and bang your head. – Phil Pinto

MIDTOWN - *Living Well Is The Best Revenge* (MCA) Midtown's last record for Drive-Thru was pretty lacking, if you ask me, but "Living Well" does have some great songs. "Become What You Hate" is an absolute anthem, although listening all the way through is a bit much for me. Midtown writes catchy, guitar-based power-pop, but contrary to what Ted Nugent thinks, there can be too much of a good thing. -Darren Paltrowitz

THE MIGHTY MIGHTY BOSSTONES - *A Jackknife To A Swan* (Side One Dummy Records) After almost 3 years between albums (they're been constantly touring.- They put on a great show the beginning of the year at Club Krome. Check "Live Reviews"), the Bosstones are back!! They're one of those bands that, once you hear their album, you gotta see 'em live! A high-energy band that mixes ska with hardcore punk with reggae, into something fresh and original. "Everybody Better" is a cool, reggae rocker that just begs to be a hit single. Like other songs on the album, the Bosstones combine social issues (check "City" or "Mr. Moran"), and fun tunes like "Sugar Free" and "You Gotta Go," and mke them into party anthems that will make you think, react, and have a ball moshing & surfin' in the process! This is a solid album, both musically and consciously. The Mighty Mighty Bosstones will be co-headlining this years Vans Warped Tour with Reel Big Fish, don't miss it! - Phil Rainone

Mighty Mighty Bosstones **Photo by Phil Rainone**

ROGER MIRET & THE DISASTERS (Hellcat/Epitaph, 2798 Sunset Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90026) Far from recalling the glory days of Agnostic Front, the debut from the aptly titled Roger Miret & The Disasters offers little more than a tepid string of third-rate street-punk/Oi! anthems, with little penchant for the unbridled aggression and frenetic songwriting that frontman Miret is capable of at his best. Songs of unity, loyalty, and defiance ring out with stale, cliched resonance. A played out, chorus-filled amalgam of anthemic hooks commence, coming off like… well, almost every other band signed to Hellcat. Despite showcasing a love for mid-tempo fist-pumping anthems, remarkably little creativity or conviction is displayed on this lengthy endeavor, recalling whimsical, nostalgic tales of life on the streets amid the boots'n'braces-touting Lower East Side Crew. A varied array of numb rallying cries, from "Boys will be boys!" to the standard "Oi! Oi!" chant, surface throughout this album's painful 31-minute duration. Ultimately, the tired, four chord Cockney Rejects-meets Rancid clone formula fails Miret and company completely. Avoid this record. – Mike Ramek

MOLOTOV COCKTAIL - *Once Upon A Time in America* (Eastern Threat Records, 150 E. 2nd St. #1A, NYC 10009) I have been waiting for a disc like this; something surprisingly refreshing as we suffer through a sweltering, life-shortening summer, and that disc comes in the form of the unapologetic punk fury of New York City's Molotov Cocktail. *Once Upon A Time in America* was recorded in CBGB's and there could not be a better venue for Molotov Cocktail to display their affection for speed, volume and raw aggression. Ignoring anything fluffy or resembling filler, *Once Upon a Time* is 23 minutes and 13 songs of classic hardcore done the right way, complete with efforts that rally against the government ("Ugly World," "Big Brother" and "Same Old Story"), working ("Invisible Cell,") and the state of music ("Indie Rock Must Die"). With lyrics such as "Kurt is dead, good riddance I said/Courtney's next and all the rest/Kill Oasis, Pearl Jam too/All the shoegazers hang them by their shoes," it's clear that MC vent their opinions with extreme prejudice and do not fear any repercussions or care for anyone's reaction. Finally, friends, a band with real guts and the musical chops to back them up. Sure, you have been sown similar paths with songs like the title track or "Too Young to Die", but in this world of formulaic bands, anthems like "Menace to Society", "One More Drink" and the riotous "Asshole" could not have arrived at a better time. There is a live feel that permeates this record, as you are given a listen to how Aron, Goose, Gabby and Johnny would sound as they rattle the walls of a club. This was a gift. - Rich Quinlan

MONEEN - *The Theory of Harmonial Value* (Smallman Records - PO Box 352, 905 Corydon Ave., Winnipeg, MB, R3M 3V3, Canada) - Moneen smells of something very bothersome. To start, their live show is a fool's parade of flying bodies and forced hi-jinx, more suited to the fall-on-the-floor metalcore genre than their sappy, Jimmy Eat World-cloned emo. The phoniness spreads to Moneen's songs and lyric sheet, riddled with sappy diary prose that has gone way off the deep end. These lyrics make The Promise Ring sound like Crass. Moneen are the kings of stupid metaphors ("dead seagull"?), forced emotion and non-stop cliches. Which brings up another possibility. Perhaps these Canadian ex-pop punkers are fucking with us. Maybe this is all a big joke at the listener's expense -- a clever scheme to create the world's sappiest emo band. It's the only way to explain the existence of this band. – Jason Schreurs

THE MULTI-PURPOSE SOLUTION – *The MPS* (76 Merrill Rd. Clifton NJ 07012) The MPS pose a problem for me: On the one hand, I am always inclined to reward originality, especially in a genre like emo where all too many bands look and sound and write exactly alike. New Jersey's Multi-Purpose Solution have earned themselves a fairly high profile in the Garden State's underground rock scene by doing just that – sounding like nobody else. The problem is that they accomplish this through the vocals of Pete Prochilo, who growls out his lyrics like a nauseous Tom Wait with lung cancer. Prochilo's vocals are so harsh and so grating that it's hard sometimes to notice the graceful mix of clean and overdrive guitars and the forceful drumming that's going on around him. Another thing: Sorry, dude, but your lyrics are awful even by the sappy standards of emo. "It's a good good thing I noticed you in those reflective sneakers I like. I could have run right into you. You could've died. You could've died!" Or "Money money money I got food in my tummy and I still got something to say, Life is gay and I'm homophobic." I love the way this band is doing everything right in terms of being a DIY punk band in a local scene. I just wished I liked their music a little more. – Jim Testa

MY LUCK - *…Is Frozen* (Youngblood Records, 217 W.Main St., Ephrata, PA 17522) Dark, exceptionally brooding hardcore propelled by a low-end chugging mass of builds, breaks, and shout alongs. The anguish and fury encapsulated in this structured volley of '88-style wrath recalls a plethora of obvious influences, but ultimately stays true to itself by presenting a singular base of especially creative lyricism that speaks volumes, and drives the six songs herein forward with force. Loss and dejection seem prominent themes here, and the aforementioned unusual lyrical base tackling frozen climates, scene romance and dire longing adds novel emphasis to the force packed into these tight bludgeonings. A solid effort. – Mike Ramek

NASHVILLE PUSSY – *Say Something Nasty* (Artemis Records) The best thing about this band of Kentucky rednecks is the overwhelming feeling of satire surrounding their music. Come on, they know their lyrics are stupid, and they know they are a cheap knock-off of AC/DC and ZZ Top, but they could care less, because that's the idea. With song titles like "Keep on Fuckin'" and "Gonna Hitchhike Down to Cincinnati and Kick the Shit Out of Your Drunk Daddy," it's obvious Nashville Pussy wear shit-eating grins in the recording studio. During live shows and in band photos they portray their trashy image to perfection — their lead guitarist even gives a beer bottle a blow job — but this is white trash satire at its best, complete with greasy hair and raging cleavage. Say Something Nasty is by far Pussy's strongest, most consistent album and has a full production sound that lends itself wonderfully to the southern fried volume attack; but, when it comes down it, this is more of the same from a one-trick pony band. If you like the trick, then you are motherfucking truckin'. Artemis Records (www.artemisrecords.com) -- Jason Schreurs

NEAR MISS - *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (Fearless Records) Near Miss are one of the above par emo/pop bands that are making a splash these days. They have a gritty sound something like that of Shades Apart. Solid songs that are easy to sing along to an enjoy. Just as the melodies start to become harmonies (good examples are "This Bridge," "Answers," & "Seasons"), and get catchy, the guitar riffs roar to life! Near Miss writes songs that are imaginative and clever. Their sound hurls itself at you from all angles. The band demonstrates a lot of maturity and confidence in songs like "To All MY Friends," & "What About Tomorrow." Few things, especially bands, seem to improve with age. With the way these 13 songs are crafted, I think Near Miss will be around for a long time to come! - Phil Rainone

THE NEW AMSTERDAMS – *Para Toda Vida* (Vagrant Records, 2118 Wilshire Blvd. #361, Santa Monica, CA, 90403). Quasi dwarf and Get Up Kids front man takes his stab at a Bob Dylan cover band. With harmonica in hand, the prince of emo may be trying to shake his momentary

ity
the nurses

NURSES – *Destroy Your Friends (Live & Demos 1979-1981)* (Hyped2Death.com) Although they were one of the first and arguably one of the most important bands in Washington DC's late-70's punk scene, the Nurses (and contemporaries like the Urban Verbs, Razz, and Slickee Boys) have been relegated to the dustbin of musical trivia, overshadowed by the D.C. hardcore punks who followed them in the Eighties. I was lucky enough to have spent a lot of time in D.C. back in those days (only because Nurses' frontman Howard Wuelfing was one of my best friends from college,) so hearing the 20 or so songs captured on this disc (culled from a handful of demo sessions and several live recordings) brought back a rush of nostalgia. The weird thing is that although I hadn't heard any of these songs in a good 20 years, I remembered almost all of them immediately. And if this disc were released today by a new band, people would be raving about the Nurses' fearless genre-bending and their fresh approach to punk. The pre-hardcore D.C. of the late 70's had its own well-defined niches – garagey power-pop on one side, pretentious art-rock on the other – but the Nurses tread an indefinable middle ground, mixing up everything from Buzzcocks-powered punk to ragged reggae-dub rhythms to Monkees power-pop. Howard Wuelfing's high, thin but pleasingly melodic vocals, Marc Halpern's inventive slashing guitar parts, and Harry Raab's precise drumming all sound as vital and alive today as they did 20 years ago. The Nurses' career ground to a halt in 1982 when Halpern died of a heroin overdose. That was a sad day for music, but it's great to see the Nurses' legacy live on. – Jim Testa

encounter with fame, an attempt to mature beyond an audience whose major unifying symbol is the hooded sweatshirt. Bottom line here, just listen to Dylan's *Greatest Hits* if you want the real deal instead of something so obviously derivative as this. Not to mention, Matthew Pryer reminds me of my ex girlfriend's meathead brother who actually joined the U.S. Air-Force after viewing the movie Top Gun. No joke. -David Gracon

NERF HERDER - *American Cheese* (Honest Don's, PO Box 192027, San Francisco, CA 94119-2027, www.honestdons.com) Pop-punk in the same vein as all of the MTV generation of pop-punk like Blink 182 and the rest. The lyrics are silly as is typical with this type of band. The tempos are generally a little slower than real pop-punk, and the sound is way too clean. In other words, very plain vanilla stuff. - Paul Silver

NEW BOMB TURKS - *The Night Before the Day the Earth Stood Still* (Gearhead Records) Seems like the Turks have been around forever (actually 12 years), spreading their unique style of garage/punk rock. The title cut grabs your attention with it's sleazy glam rock and one of the dirtiest sax attacks (Pete Linzell), this side of Ziggy Stardust (Bowie). New Bombs Turks are a throw back to when rock & roll looked and sounded dangerous (New York Dolls, Ramones, etc.). They update the sound and rejuvenate the genre. Easily one of the punkest records around, the Turks are touring with labelmates the Demons, both of which are from Sweden. Not that it makes a big difference, but Sweden seems to be a breeding ground for garage rock recently (Hellicopters, Vines, etc.). It don't matter where they come from, as long as they keep coming! - Phil Rainone

NEW MODEL ARMY - *Radio Sessions '83-'84* (Abstract Records, PO Box 29459, Kensington Station, Philadelphia, PA 19125) Originally released in 1987 in England, this collection of tracks are from assorted radio shows including John Peel's famous sessions, allow NMA to show off their knack for catchy, politically motivated postpunk/pop rock hybrids. Knowing very little about this band, I was impressed with the vocals of Justin Sullivan, who expresses his clear frustration with the English class structure and government policies without ever losing an indefinable harmony and unavoidable smoothness. Ultimately, is obvious that New Model Army is one of the more intelligent acts out there, doing their political history homework and writing with wonderful articulation about contemporary English issues long before acts like Bad Religion began to dissect the governmental stumbles of America. Named after Oliver Cromwell's fighting units of the 17th century, the majority of New Model Army's tracks like "Notice Me" and "Liberal Education" are bouncy and bss heavy, thanks to the playing of Stuart Morrow. However, it is the critical "Smalltown England" and "Spirit of the Falklands" (an acidic description of the English battles with Argentina over the aforementioned collection of islands) that truly mesh together the poetry and punk aesthetics of this band. There are other pieces here that are equally poignant and powerful, such as "The Cause" and "The Attack," proving that NMA understood, and continue to realize, that punk rock can be used to open people's minds. Worth your money whether you are a first timer or long time fan. - Rich Quinlan

NICOTINE- *Samurai Shot* (Asian Man, PO Box 35585, Monte Sereno CA 95030) Competent yet bland and tasteless pop-punk of the Fat Wreck variety hailing from Tokyo, Nicotine have a penchant for the goofy, particularly the vocals. I've heard one of the cuts here covered by someone else and frankly, neither version impressed me. There's enough material here, 25 songs in all, to fill two CDs, but a little Nicotine goes a long way. – Johnny Puke

NIPPLE (Bullet Productions, 4 Park Ave. New York NY 10016) Nipple is all about the guitars: Jhon Thumb plays the kind of "technical" solos that make the Yngwie Malsteem-lovin' mooks at guitar magazines drool. Couple that with a lyrical and melodic sensibility somewhat south of Jane's Addiction and you've got a band that's clearly out of the indie-rock mainstream, especially in the increasingly-bland New Jersey indie rock landscape. This latest eponymous 8-song effort recycles "King" from Jhon's early-Nineties prog-funk-metal band Mr. Thumb as the opening track, and begins with several short feisty bursts of trademark guitar spew. As the EP progresses, the songs get longer, slower, weirder, and more likely to inspire me to hit the SKIP button to the next song until you get to "As Above So Below," a classic boogie rocker that reminds you that Nipple can actually be a lot of fun when you're in the right frame of mind (for instance, really drunk or stoned and in a PAR-TAY mood.) – Jim Testa

NO USE FOR A NAME - *Hard Rock Bottom* (Fat Wreck Cords) Besides having one of the coolest band names around, No Use For A Name have a new, powerful release. I really like Tony Sly's vocals. They're a little quietier than you'd expect for a punk band. There's also more passion, both in the vocals and music. Matt Riddle/bass, dave Nassie/lead guitar, & Rory Koff/ drums combine to make this album work on a few levels. The band has been around since 1987. Besides longevity, what's also impressive is that they can do an album like this. Usually by now, most bands with this much playing time are usually coasting on past achievements. No Use For A Name sound like their as hungry to play as when they first started. "Dumb Reminders," "Any Number Can Play," "Solitare," or "Nailed Shut" are catchy & hard, with cool lyrics. In the liner notes they say,"Lyrics that make even the dumbest punk rocker sit back and think." Couldn't have said it better myself, especially since it applies to me also! - Phil Rainone

NO FX – *45 Or 46 Songs That Weren't Good Enough To Go On Our Other Records* – Double CD (Fat Wreck Chords) As a curious kid from West Virginia, I first went to CBGB in 1984 to see the Offenders, Upright Citizens, Krieg Kopf, and an unknown opener from California called No FX. I wanted to talk to them as they seemed as out-of-place as I did (we were all young and snapping lots of pictures of the famous CBGB.) But I never got the chance. Who would have thought that a decade later, they'd be one of the biggest things since sliced bread, releasing this odds 'n' ends retrospective going as far back as '84. This 2-disc set is exquisitely packaged with informative and funny anecdotes from Fat Mike himself. While I have to say that Fat Mike is an excellent and thought-provoking songwriter, he must be an idiot-savant, as his hand-written lyrics here show an author who often uses words he cannot spell. One can only assume he has learned big words from Bad Religion albums because Mike can't spell words in at least 13 songs here. *45 Or 46 Songs...* collects compilation tracks, EP's, and a few leftovers, but in true No FX vinyl-lovin' fashion, they leave off a song here and there to pique collectors and piss off completists. Disc One is much more varied and several songs here ("The Plan," "Pimps and Hookers," "Bath Of Least Resistance") are above average, top-notch No FX. Disc Two is the "Fuck The Kids" and "Surfer" 7-inches in their (almost) entirety, but this material may be more interesting to the band (like "Timmy The Turtle" on Disc One) than to their fans. All that said, if you're a fan (like I am,) you're going to have to pick this up. If you don't know No FX but you're into punk at all, you may need to check your butt to see if there's a stick up there, as No FX are a really inspired group of good musicians with attitude, who influence on the world of punk is undeniable. God bless 'em, I loved this. – Johnny Puke

NOISE RATCHET – *Till We Have Faces* (The Militia Group, 16662 Goldenwest St. #1, Huntington Beach, CA, 92647) – Semi-rocking emo in the vein of Jimmy Eat World. Perfect for background listening after a long day of heavy fucking metal. As most albums do, Till We Have Faces really nosedives in the second half. The plunge happens right around where ballads like "Wardrobe" kick in, but the first few tracks on the album are solid for this genre. Noise Ratchet have a terrible name, but a promising future in the wild world of radio friendly emo rock. – Jason Schreurs

NOODLE MUFFIN – *Magnum Dopus* (Fyoog State Records PO Bo 25697, Los Angeles, CA 90025, noodlemuffin.com) This is Video Killed The Radio Star" for kids who jerk off more than four times a day, which isn't to specify, really, what you should be listening to if you jerk off less than that, although a scale could be created, sure. If you find yourself laughing aloud to Ween, don't mind songs about cum shots and facials and penis envy, aren't afraid of grown men who sound like kids, then this might fulfill some kind of niche in your sort-of-outmoded, wood-paneled, Coors-sipping existence. -Brandon Stosuy

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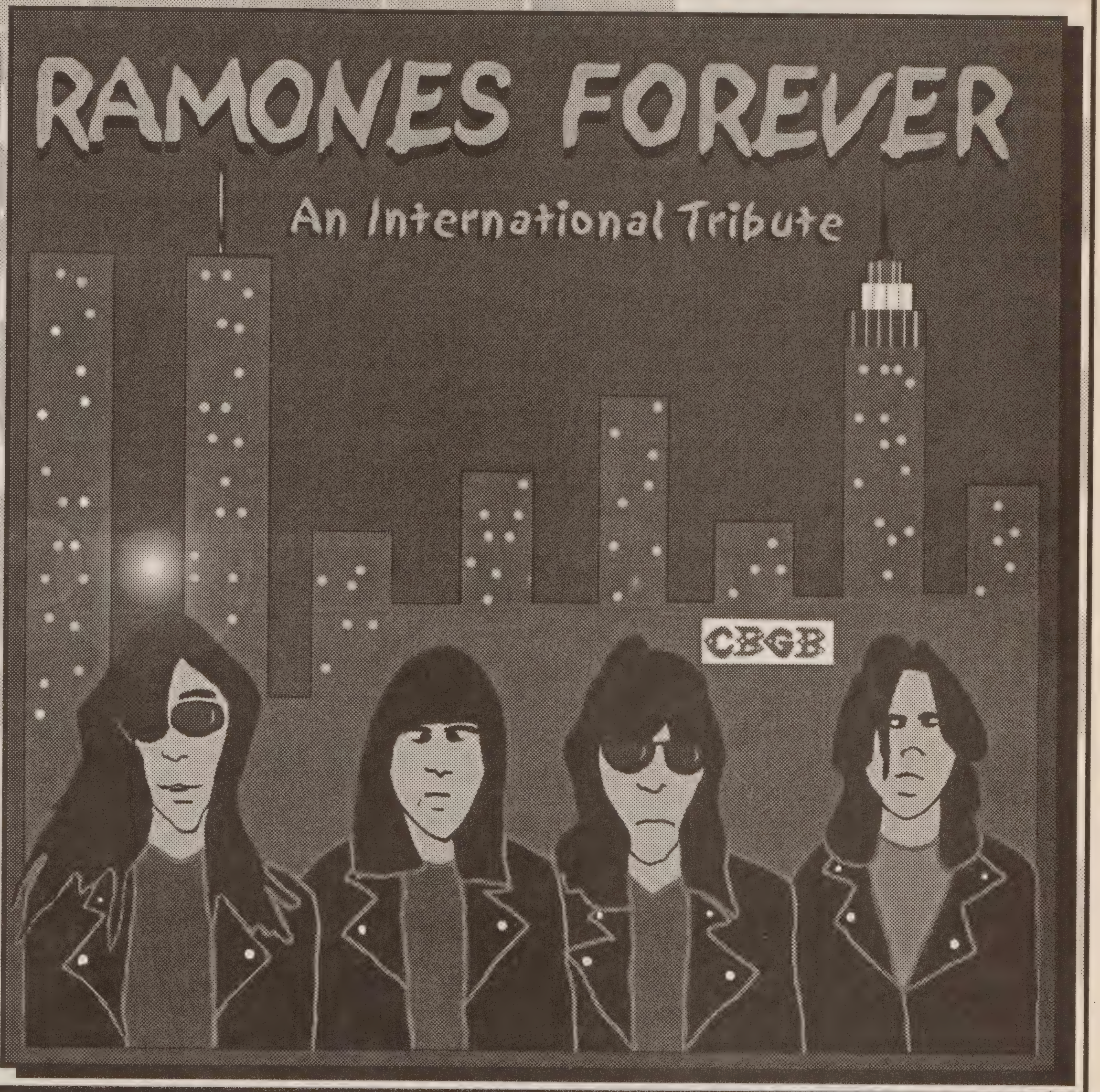
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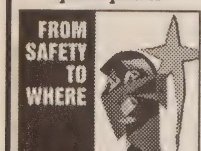
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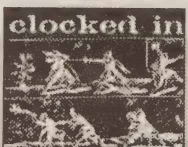
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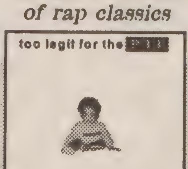
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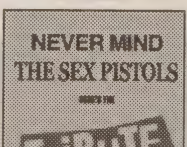
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OF MONTREAL - *Aldhils Arboretum* (Kindercore Records, PO Box 461, Athens, GA 30603, www.kindercore.com) This is very obviously heavily influenced by 1960 and 70s pop. And in particular, bands of the British invasion, such as the Beatles, the Kinks, and I even hear hints of early Pink Floyd (Syd Barret era). The sound is very upbeat, sparkly, and psychedelic, almost unreasonably so (thus the Barrett comparison). It it's bouncy and quirky and, and, and so full of vivid colors, man! "Kissing in the Grass" is a really really really different song, sounding more like it came from a twisted wedding band than a standard pop band. You get the idea. Different. And different is good. - Paul Silver

THE OFFBEATS - *Dumb Looks Still Free* (Smog Veil, smogveil.com) *Dumb Looks Still Free* is a 39 song respective spanning from 82-86 from 80's Cleveland pop punk band The Offbeats. The group mixed the hardcore thrash of the day with super catchy hooks to create a catalog of tunes that any fan of AOD, The Dickies, The Buzzcocks, or Screeching Weasel would love. -Rick K.

ON THE MIGHT OF PRINCES - *Where You Are and Where You Want To Be* (Traffic Violation, PO Box 772, East Setauket, NY 11733, trafficviolation.com) The spastic opener “The Water vs. The Anchor,” reminds me of the first time I heard Clikatat Ikatowi: many-part yelling and rigorous guitar work, angular Unwound-like dual vocal yells and screams, almost baroque guitar interludes, fairly plaintive song structures. Capable. Loud. I listened to this track over and over just before I left the town where I was living. Before emo was a bastardized genre in lack of a history this is what I’d consider emotional music: screams, sighs, feedback, off-kilter starts/stops, obvious but felt dynamics, people carving “I’m Sorry” into their arms. As a more defined reference, I’m thinking of the first Mineral LP and how I listened to it every day one fucked-up winter, or the time I saw Christie Front Drive in a basement in New Brunswick and walked outside so I could hear what such prettiness sounded like as a muffled sigh through the walls. Like those groups, or even Jawbreaker, On The Might of Princes, juggle well-worn tropes with enough heart and personalized input to pull off a really solid, frenetic, and often disarmingly beautiful record. -Brandon Stosuy

ONELINEDRAWING - *Visitor* (Jade Tree) Jonah Matranga first established himself with major label victims Far, and now he is striking with two barrels as the lone member of One Line Drawing (OLD) and the brilliant New End Original. *Visitor* is a warmly textured acoustic record of songs that are openly human and express innermost fears and truths with a sense of self-exposing humor and earnesty. "Um...", "Bitte Ein Kuss", "Smile", a song featuring additional musicianship from an R2-D2 sound-alike, and the title track are all samples of Jonah's barebones recording style and his willingness to reveal embarrassing elements about himself with a wry smile and infectious hook. The musical explosion at the end of "Sixes" sums up the record: it is an unexpected burst of energy that seemed to arrive perfectly, as this record as a whole is a masterful collection of sing/songwriting bliss. Normally, acoustic discs can become repetitive, but Jonah has he ability to make each effort fresh and wholly individualistic. I was immersed from the opening chord and look forward to attempting to check OLD live this summer.-Rich Quinlan

BETH ORTON - *Daybreaker* (Heavenly/Astralwerks) This is the sort of record that I can listen to many times, know that it's instrument sound beautiful and that its songs are incredible, yet not be able to name a song. All of it blends together, although I do mean that in a good way. Ultimately, Beth Orton still stands somewhere between electric-folk and trip-hop, stylistically-speaking. If this one turns up in every critic's Top-10-of-2002 list, well, I'll admit that it's deserving of such an honor. -Darren Paltrowitz

OTTO'S DAUGHTER - *Renew* (PO Box 8198 North Bergen, NJ 07047) A marvelously dark, droning, and positively seductive full-blown foray into hypnotically buzzing, bizarro Goth trance-rock electronic weirdness, this arrestingly odd and off-kilter sonic freak-out dilly is truly something to hear. Bewitchingly brassy Euro Goth queen Jacqueline van Bierk's husky, panting, whispery vocals are downright mesmerizing, forcefully projecting a gutsy, fiercely independent tough gal persona that's alluring and intimidating in comparable measure. The blistering three guitar assault further stirs up the frantically bubbling pot with unrelenting steadiness while the churning bass and gutty drums keep the smoothly propulsive rhythm momentum on a thrillingly even and coolly undulating keel throughout. All in all, this swirling aural peculiarity makes for a memorably sexy and spooky outing. – Joe Wawyrzniak

OXYMORON - *Best Before 2000* (Victory) This German band dates back to the early nineties when they spent their time filling in a void for a then absent skin head punk sound. What followed were many singles, compilations, etc. that sold over 100,000. Now those of us non-collector scum can easily get the out of print back catalog on one CD. This is honest street Oi that stands the test of time, loud, angry and proving that punk's still not dead. -- Tom Brebric

PANIC (Bridge 9 Records POB990052 Boston, MA02199-0052) To their credit, Boston's Panic have further improved upon their previous Bridge 9 endeavor to produce a wholly well rounded, comparatively channeled and direct display of noise-addled melancholy this time around. Frontman Gibby Miller, of the tragically defunct streetpunk/hardcore hybrid The Trouble, which boasted an impressive, morose Joy Divison-era new wave-slant and a penchant for moving, unusually articulate and insightful lyricism, has now focused his songwriting skills on a less elaborate scheme of cohesive, straight forward tunes that showcase a semblance of the token late 80s structural pull, and contain hints of an early X-claim-era Boston sound, as well. With the obsessive, downtrodden, anti-nostalgic lyricism fully intact, and an improved, more focused base of simple yet often harrowing hoarse vocal exclamations and chord pummeling, Panic has shown a knack for improving and sharpening their sound on their self-titled second installment, and the results are certainly promising. · Mike Ramek

PARTICLE ZOO - *It's In The Cans* (pzoo.com) The pleasantly folksy, jaunty, breezily engaging foursome who previously won me over with their last 8-song CD deliver another whimsical charmer. The music is as upbeat, low-fi, and catchy as before, all soothingly laid-back excursions into wiggy reflectivity with casually hoppin' chugalug tempos coupled with subdued beats. The arrangements are likewise pleasingly spare and harmonic, showcasing bouncy guitars offset by simmering organ ripples. Things get seriously trippy in the downright strange stop'n'go sonic workout “Duluth,” while the band cuts a particularly tasty shuffling groove with “Ridiculous Games.” The supremely boss instrumental “Personova” adds deliciously mellow horns to already delectable mix, and the hilariously dippy “There's a Party in My Pants” concludes these delightfully quirky festivities on a hysterically wacky note. – Joe Wawyrzniak

THE PARTY OF HELICOPTERS - *Space...And How Sweet It Was* (Troubleman Unlimited, 16 Willow St. Bayonne, NJ 07002) *Space...And How Sweet It Was* displays the varied style of guitar force possessed by this equally challenging and punishing band. From the all out rage of the paint-peeling "Bastard Motherfucker", to the ten plus minutes of wafting ambiance which is "The Conquering", the Party of Helicopters are a demanding band to adequately describe. "Slowdance", "Free Junk" and the sprawling "The Tundra" all encapsulate elements of warm pop and disturbingly jagged rhythms that would seem to be polar opposites until actually heard. The balance between the band's metal indulgences and their more refined sensibilities separates this act from the myriad of generic acts flooding the globe. Along the lines of ...And You will Know Us By the Trail of the Dead, the Party of Helicopters use cryptic lyrics and swirling power to make music which is intensely beautiful and without many peers. Treat yourself to the musical monolith of "Crawling" to get an idea of what this band is capable of achieving. Get out of the way. - Rich Quinlan

PEGLEGASUS - *Learning Curve* (Peglegasus.com) Formulating a sound which draws inspiration from both Rhode Island and Austin, Texas, Peglegasus are twangy poets whose brand of precise, pop laced anthems have began to earn them national attention. Forming originally in tiny Block Island, Rhode Island, Peter Voskamp (drummer), guitarist John Voskamp and second guitarist Berke Marye moved to Texas and were clearly influenced by the Southwest, as heard on "Bilge Pump" and "Let's Say the Dog Did It." *Learning Curve* is a mixture of dusty instrumentation and indie rock aesthetics. Two brief instrumentals, "Crogue" and the noisy closer "Jackinapes" are unique additions to an otherwise serene and gentile collection, highlighted by "Ancient Troubling Times" and "Any Old Thing." Peglegasus is an intelligent, articulate band that does not allow those traits to stand in the way of making great rock nuggets that will please the popster in you as well. - Rich Quinlan

THE PETTIT PROJECT – *Be Mine…If It's Not Too Much Trouble* (Pettit Project, 261 Petit Court, Oakville ONT Canada L6H 5K8) Very poppy, keyboard-driven stuff from Canada with a vibe like Atom & His Package, without being so jokey. Hell, they deserve points for the creative CD title alone, and the title of their songs give you the idea that at least one of these kids is a total wise-ass (“I'll Bury You At Makeout Creek,” “You're Champagne & I'm Shiznit.”) Nice harmonies with male/female vocals and catchy if quirky pop tunes (fourteen of 'em). As much as I hate all things from Upper Mexico,it's hard to dis the Pettit Project. – Johnny Puke

PINQ – *Quiet Games For Hot Weather* (Major 7 Records, 1646 Page St. San Francisco, CA 94117). This release from Pinq (not to be confused with Pink) has been the soundtrack of my daily commute to work, where the sun has pierced the clouds once, maybe twice. *Quiet Games* is befitting for long stretches of overcast days or cuddling up with your loved one on a snowy evening. One night, I thought my girlfriend was going to start crying after the ten-minute “X-mas with the Matador” came to its epic close. Yes, this record is that emotive and powerful. Hailing from San Francisco, this quartet specializes in a lethargic slow-core groove similar to Bedhead, Seam and the guitar jangles of Gallaxie 500. While these influences are certainly evident, and yes, these are influences worth noticing, Pinq utilizes a certain degree of post-rock knob turning as ambient drones and beautifully textured samples are worked into the mix. This record challenges you to listen to detail, to notice all the intricate things occurring at one time. The tracks are often quietly restrained and deeply textured, yet not overwhelming or excessive. Song structures build and play with pop expectation and you eventually hear some beautiful “rock out” moments. This record would make an interesting soundtrack for a time-lapse film featuring nothing but flowers. We'd see a progression starting with the growth and eventual blossoming, then the inevitably wilting away to nothing. I guess you could say it's a fair visual equivalent of how this record sounds. An absolute gem! -David Gracon

PIRX THE PILOT – *Fri Night Seafood Buffet* (New Disorder Records, 115 Bartlett St., San Francisco, CA, 94110) – Musical inventiveness is an admirable goal to achieve for any band. It doesn't matter how many different songwriting ideas get thrown in the blender, though, or how many different genres are borrowed from and fucked with, if the songs aren't interesting and catchy, the music just doesn't rock. Pirx the Pilot suffer from a bad case of thinking too hard about how different they want to sound. They should take a musical laxative and relax a little, loosen the grip on those instruments and feel the groove. What we get instead is a tuneless mix of hardcore, punk, folk and indie rock, but not enough of any of those to create one memorable song. The lyrics are humble and thought provoking, accompanied by intelligently written song explanations. Unfortunately, the thought of listening to these strange songs again is just too painful. · Jason Schreurs

THE PIXIES (SpinArt) Did the seminal Pixies write most of their entire career's better songs before their first album, and then basically coast by re-releasing it over the next three records? This CD certainly stands as an argument reinforcing that theory. All nine tracks here were recorded in 1987 during the sessions for the Pixies' debut *Come On Pilgrim.* Although these are outtakes, all the songs here are completely mixed and don't sound dissimilar to their re-recorded versions that would later turn up on *Bossa Nova, Surfer Rosa, Doolittle,* and *Trompe Le Monde.* In some ways, this could almost be a Greatest Hits package, since all the favorite Pixies songs are here, including “Here Comes Your Man” and “I'm Amazed.” Diehard fans will want this for “In Heaven” and “Rock My Soul,” the two exclusive tracks that for some reason the band never recycled. I enjoyed this but I must admit that it does now make me think of one of my favorite all-time bands as kind of lazy. – Johnny Puke

PLACE OF SKULLS - *Nailed* (Southern Lord Recordings - PO Box 291967, Los Angeles, CA, 90029) - Bust out the pot stash and the bibles, Place of Skulls are here to preach the truth of Jesus as they take another massive hit off the bong. Ex-Pentagram guitarist Victor Griffin is the mastermind behind this stoner white metal outfit from Tennessee. The combination of fuzzed out, murky, hazy megariffs and God-loving words narrow the target audience of Place of Skulls significantly, but, come on, there has to be so me pot-smoking religious freaks out there somewhere, right? Those three people will worship this album with a toke and a prayer. - Jason Schreurs

PLAIN WHITE T's - Stop (Fearless Records) There's a ton of pop/punk bands out there trying to get noticed. The Plain White T's do it simply through their music. The closest I can come to describing their music is Evelyn Forever. They each play melodic, catchy songs, but they both have that 'something extra.' In the Plain White T's case it's super catchy lyrics, propelled be tight, ragged harmonies. You'll find all that and alot more as you get deeper into the disc. "Stop," "Please Don't Do This, " or "Happy Someday," cry out to be hit singles! The production Loren Israel), is top notch. Here's one of those indie bands that you'll be telling your friends that you were the first to discover, before they become big (Blink, Green Day, etc.). - Yeah, they're that good! - Phil Rainone

THE PLUS ONES - *It's A Calling* (Asian Man) Ex-Mr. T Experience bassist Joel Reader fronts a four-piece that also has Luis Illades of Pansy Division on drums and fellow Bay Area residents/ guitarists Scotty Hay and John Speranza. Questionably an all-star band, but unquestionably one of the most promising power-pop bands I've heard all year. They've grown leaps and boundaries since the "On The List" EP for Coldfront, and "Serve In Heaven/Rule In Hell" is absolute evidence of that. -Darren Paltrowitz

POLARA – *Jetpack Blues* (Susstones) Nice to see Ed Ackerson and Polara bounce back after their rocky sojourn on Interscope ended. It figures that now that he's back on an indie, Ackerson has committed himself to making Polara's neo-psychedelic madness even thicker, denser, and more elaborate than ever, with an orchestra's worth of synthesizers and guitars layered on every track. What separates Ackerson from many of his contemporaries is his pop sense; he knows that even the wiggiest music still has to be listenable. So imagine the Flaming Lips with more mainstream vocals, or Spiritualized with more hummable melodies, or Brian Wilson with a Nineties' sensibility. And you gotta love the gall of a guy who'd go ahead and name a song "Is This It?" as if those NYC neo-mods didn't matter at all. – Jim Testa

THE POLYPHONIC SPREE – *The Beginning Stages Of...* (Good Records, 617 N Lorimar, Dallas TX 75204) This 10-piece choral group (all in white robes, with a 13 piece orchestra) were the surprise hit of SXSW 2002 and with good reason. Led by ex-Tripping Daisy frontman Tim DeLaughter, the Polyphonic Spree combines Smile-era Brian Wilson with a more accessible Flaming Lips. The songs don't have titles and don't need them, it's all sunny voices raised in harmony singing about flowers and sunshine. Somehow the hippie vibe doesn't overwhelm the material and you find yourself playing this over and over and making your day a little bit brighter with every listen. -- Jim Testa

POULAIN - With Fingers Crossed (Soft Serve Records) Lethargic pop music that sounds like the performers are very sad and/or bored. The music is repetetive, but not nearly as much as the lyrics. Each song has lyrics repeated over and over and over and over and over and over. It's like these people have a limited vocabulary or something. This sort of sounds like they were going for a sort of Spiritualized crossed with My Bloody Valentine sort of sound. But guys, you didn't make it. - Paul Silver

The PRE-TEENS - *Sunday Morning Service* (www.thepreteens.com) Indie rock/pop-punksters The Pre-Teens have an unjaded, fresh feel to their music. They formed in L.A. in '97, and have a few releases under their belt. So, obviously, they're in their late teens now. Chunky riffs (check "Railing" or "Here"), propelled by snap, crackle and pop vocals (male/female) give the Pre-Teens dynamic clean songs. Very energized and fun to listen to! -Phil Rainone

THE PROWL (Gloom Records, PO BOX 14253, Albany, NY 12212) From the backwoods sprawl of Western Massachusetts come the Prowl, with a furious rock infused assault of early '80s style hardcore punk. Featuring members of the infamous Last In Line, The Prowl offer a comparatively melodic complement to that band's Negative Approach-esque tirades, offering a sizeable, bombasitc infusion of wailing axe noise, and a nice array of hooks interspersed into the loose, stunted cacophony. Vocalist Mikey Flynn shrieks, howls, and shouts his way through the morose, ugly messages of hatred, lust, and brutality here (prevalent, reoccurring themes concern dysfunctional relationships, suicide, and serial murder) with a spastic unpredictability that recalls both a looser version of X-claim-era early Boston hardcore, and hints of an unrefined mid-tempo rock'n'roll feel, as well. Fans of the early '80s Out Cold-esque psycho-cacophony that has quickly become the hallmark of the Western Mass scene over the last few years will be especially pleased with this debut side project. – Mike Ramek

THE PUPILS – *The Pupils* (Dischord Records, 3819 Beecher Street NW, Washington DC 20007) Side projects seem to be all the rage these days in indie rock circles and in the spirit of the times, the Pupils is an artistic aside for Dan Higgs and Asa Osbourne of Lungfish. The duo's self-titled album doesn't stray as far away from Lungfish's emo roots as one might think but still manages to stand alone with a distinctive artistic identity of its own. The Pupils' material is eerie, stark and extremely powerful, sparse guitar and percussion matched by Higgs' plaintive wail to great effect. Lyrically, Higgs often comes out of left field with odd imagery and oblique poetry, but several of the tunes here resonate with a certain clarity. Among the best cuts are "Fountain Flame" with its majestic lyrical landscape and "Mysterium," which offers some of the most convoluted pairing of syllables since Greg Graffin picked up a thesaurus, the song nevertheless weaving a hypnotic spell with exotic rhythms and echoed vocals. On the other hand, the electronic screeching of "Lamb With Human Hands" or the purposeful minimalism of "Witness The Sidewalk Weeping Pools Of Martian Brine" sound like something out of Roky Erickson's worst lysergic nightmares. Overall, the Pupils' debut is a passable effort, an acquired taste, perhaps, but one sure to challenge your preconceived notions of rock music...and that's not a bad thing. (www.dischord.com) – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

Q AND NOT U - *On Play Patterns EP* (Dischord, 3819 Beecher St. NW, Washington, DC 20007) Two songs providing two varied perspectives of this skilled trio. The opening "Ten Thousands Animals Calls," has a warm guitar riff which is encircled by incredibly harmonious vocals and intricate percussion. All on all, this is a blissful piece of heady, individualistic rock that blends the finer points of swirling off-kilter rhythms and a refrain that will be in your head for days. There is also a well balance mixture of volume and controlled force, as they alters tempos without ever sounding contrived. "Soft Pyramids" highlights the keyboard skills of Chris Richards, as gentle keys waft above the kinetic drumming of John Davis to create a song far more experimental than its predecessor. I was intrigued by both tracks, for they offered very different, yet equally energizing styles of playing, meshing elements of pop, dance and guitar rock into one swirling achievement. Made me anxious for the full length. - Rich Quinlan

Q AND NOT U - *Different Damage* (Dischord, 3819 Beecher St., Washington DC 20007-1802)The highly unique and occasionally musically ambiguous Q And Not U return with Different Damage, a record of very different styles. John Davis, Harris Klahr and Christopher Richards mix and match musical genres with incredible fluidity along with their own flair for the original. "So Many Animal Calls" and "Black Plastic Bag" are heavier, nosier anthems that appear in stark contrast with more gentle and subtle tracks such as "Meet Me in the Pocket" and "Snow Patterns." However, this is a band that thrives on integrating a variety of aesthetics into their music, as "Recreation Myth" and the album's best "Everybody Ruins" prove. This is ultimately too unstable and inconsistent for me, but the band must be commended for their willingness to
break away from conventional genre limitations and challenge those who have the courage to check this out. - Rich Quinlan

THE QUEERS – *Pleasant Screams* (Lookout!) Honestly, this is an exceptional effort from the small-town New Hampshire smart-ass band that became a worldwide brand name in punk. This album is head and shoulders above anything the band has released in the past few mediocre years at Hopeless and even better than some of their records from their golden years at Lookout (like *Move Back Home* and *Later Days*.) The humor's still there in songs like "See You Later Fuckface" and "Homo." The melodic Beach Boys-style songs are here too, but with better backup harmonies than a lot of recent Queers' albums. Perhaps best of all is "Molly Neuman," a garage-rocker produced in the style of the Queers' classic "Junk Freak" that takes a stab at one of Lookout's most notorious employees. Three songs here were written or co-written by Ben Weasel (one with input from Joey Ramone), there's a song by the Angry Samoans' Metal Mike, and covers of Donovan, Fantastic Baggys, and The Choir (the ultra-catchy "It's Cold Outside," which some of you might know better from the Stiv Bators version.) This is a fantastic album overall, but Joe Queer's next challenge should be to give us a record this good next year, but one he wrote all by himself. - Johnny Puke

The Queers

Rearview Mirror

RANDY – ."Cheater" EP (G7 Welcoming Committee Records, PO Box 27006, C-360 Main St., Winnipeg, MB, R3C 4T3, Canada) – Wow! It's amazing how much a band can change and improve in a handful of years. Randy have stripped down their Snuff with political lyrics sound of old and hit the garage for this quick EP of three new songs and three more previously released tracks. The new songs were recorded in Canada on their North American tour with Propagandhi and sound nothing like their travelling buddies. Instead, we get no-frills garage punk from these testy Swedes. Excellent! – Jason Schreurs

REARVIEW MIRROR - *All Lights* Off (Gobstopper/Palm Records, 601 West 26th Street, New York, NY 10001) Okay, so you're one of those picky types who wants to hear a tough, gritty, major league serious and committed album that's all killer and no filler. Well, this very promising Iowa foursome have successfully pulled that particular extraordinary feat with their breathtaking debut album. No kidding about the first-rate vocals: Slightly quivery, highly passionate, and remarkably expressive, Adam Ptacek's singing goes for the throat with hair-raising bluntness. The savagely thick, churning, and surging arrangements likewise smoke, with sinewy guitars, potently gutty drums, and sturdy bass played with a scorchingly steady and unwavering sense of razor-sharp precision. The chunky beats and slow but constantly trudging tempos move along at a thrillingly gradual clip, thundering their way into your psyche like a mighty bulldozer going uphill at a relaxed yet persistent speed. The band's fiercely honest and up-front lyrical sensibility - an admirably realistic down-to-earth attitude which views the unkind world warts and all through astute, unblinking, unapologetically unsentimental eyes, clinches this baby's status as a 100% winner. – Joe Wawyrzniak

RED ANIMAL WAR - *Black Phantom Crusades* (Deep Elm records PO Box 36939 Charlotte, NC 28236) Expanding upon the standard guitar rock fare that normally defines this genre for which Deep Elm is known, Red Animal War bring a new sense of melody and intensity. This is no more true than on the saxophone-laced, bluesy, suicide anthem "Straight Lines for Construction Workers." Impressive guitar interplay accents crisply delivered vocals with biting, humanist lyrics of suffering and dissatisfaction that is easily relatable to nearly everyone who hears this record, best heard on "When I Get the Feelin'. (I heard someone say America the Beautiful/Blame the Catholics, blame the Muslims/Blame the Jews, blame your mother, blame your father/But blame never got anyone anywhere/When I get the feelin' back in my hands/I promise I'll build bridges across this land.") Played with an urgency that has become a nearly forgotten art, "Mouse," "And So It Begins With Bombs" and "Jambalaya" resonate with true passion that emerges through the emotionally charged vocals of Justin Wilson who offers his words with a sense of questioning, not pretending to know all the answers, brazingly revealing his own insecurities and concerns that plague so many. The band's appearance on the Emo Diaries first piqued my interest, but this is light years beyond their earlier work. A great release. - Rich Quinlan

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS - *By The Way* (Warner Bros) Already into the fourth song, I'm diggin' the cool melodic vibe the Chili Peppers are creating. Although, once you go back and get into the words, it's a whole other story. Death, jail, and heartbreak are woven into the fabric of the otherwise catchy songs. "By the Way" is like a bloody love letter. It's full of passion, but once you see the blood stains underneath the words, you realize something is terribly wrong. On "Can't Stop" (7th song), the band slides into a funky groove with lyrics to match. These 16 songs can make you feel like you've got nothing left to live for, or it can make you feel like your on top of the world at times. That's how powerful this album is. - Phil Rainone

RED PREACHER GONE TO TEXAS - *Choice vs. Change* (Sinister Label, PO Box 1178, La Grange Park, IL 60526, www.sinisterlabel.com) This is eight tracks of contradiction. It's melodic and flowing in places, even including piano in the arrangements in some places. Then it gets raucous and emo-math-core in the instrumentals and hardcore in the intensely shouted vocals. Sometimes it's really cool, but sometimes it just seems like it's overdone, overly grandiose, overblown. But most of the time it is pretty cool. It's like the straight edge hardcore band full of teenagers in which everyone grew up and matured, musically, except the vocalist. - Paul Silver

REEL BIG FISH - *Cheer Up* (Jive/Mojo) Their first record in over 4 years was worth waiting for! Their signature style, which combines pop/punk/rock/ reggae & ska is still in tact. It's virtually impossible to label them, especially with their tight crisp harmonies. (If the Beach Boys had ventured deeper into pop rock, they'd probably sound similar to RBF) Besides a solid album of songs (Check "Good Thing", "Ban The Tube Top", & "Dateless Losers" for starters), they include an incredibly sweet a cappella version of "New York, New York ".- Ol' Blue Eyes would be proud! Here's an band with upbeat, horn/guitar driven music, and fun sing-a long-lyrics. Their live show (check "Live Reviews"), is exciting to watch, with all that's going on. It's like having Cheap Trick as the core band, combining The Marx Bros. zany stage antics, and Uncle Frank (Zappa) as the ring master and lyricist. RBF has the unique ability to take their music from the studio, and transform them into even more powerful, and fun songs on stage. I can't wait o see them perform the new songs live! They'll be co-headlining this years Vans Warped Tour with The Mighty Mighty Bosstones. It should be quite a show! - Phil Rainone

REMEMBERING NEVER - *She Looks So Good In Red* (Ferret Music Corp 47 Wayne St. #3 Jersey City, NJ 07302) At their most brutal, Florida's Remembering Never present some fairly decent, albeit wholly uninventive, excursions into blast beat-driven metalcore, but even *that* is quickly marred by the addition of some played out 'emotive' melodic chugging especially prevalent in that respective region as of late, and the ever present croon (sigh) that inevitably surfaces. Plagued by pseudo-poetic lovelorn lyricism, the end result is a glaringly cliché offering from yet another misguided act passing for 'metal' these days. Nothing that hasn't been done before. –Mike Ramek

REVERSE - *The Jersey Switch* (www.reverse3.com). Pretty rockin' band from Boston puts out lots of energy and emotion on this 11-song release. I wouldn't say this is anything new or groundbreaking but it's just how they present it all. Lots of catchy parts that capture and demand your attention, solid grooves and hooks laid down by the rhythm section, and very clean but not whiny vocals make this album very easy to hear and not take it outta your CD player. – Phil Pinto

RIDDLIN KIDS - *Hurry Up and Wait* (Aware/Columbia) A young band that plays some fine pop/punk rock. They've fast become a seasoned band, having played a slot on last years Crouching Fish/Hidden Finger Tour. (along with Reel Big Fish & Goldfinger it was a great show)! the music is as fired up as is the bands stage show. I've ben hearing the first single "I Feel Fine" on WHTG (there's still hope for the radio station). Like the rest of the album it has tight and catchy guitars and lyrics. This ain't no watered-down mall punk. The Riddlin' Kids are all about the music. Equally impressive both live or on disc. Also, check out their cover of REM's "It's the End of the World."- Cool as all hell, and you can understand the words! - Phil Rainone

THE RIFFS - *Dead End Dream* (TKO Records) They might be from Portland, but after hearing this, you'd swear it was 25 years ago in London. By now my taste in this style of music is obvious to anyone who reads my reviews, but be that as it may, this is just great rock & roll. I always admire a band who aren't afraid of their influences but are original and talented enough not to just come across as a rip off. Kick back, drink heavily and enjoy these guys sing their disgruntled tales of drug abuse, dead end jobs and faded dreams. – Tom Brebric

RINGWORM - *Birth Is Pain* (Victory Records 346 North Justine Street Suite 504 Chicago, IL 60607) The progenitors of the Clevo-core mosh return after years of relative inactivity with a noteworthy effort that ranks among the best of their previous work. Once more, the punishing metal-singed force that is Ringworm offer up a dosage of massive, rhythmic hardcore (that's hardcore, not *metal*core, or any other core-suffixed moniker, mind you) with that tantalizing, instantly recognizable regional tumult matched only by Integrity in their FTWFT/Systems Overload-era prime. This is an unconditionally bruising, largely mid-tempo riff-slinging uproar that takes it time wallowing in the bleak grime-coated soundscape concocted with every lick-bludgeon and double-bass pedal blast. Vocalist Human Furnace and company deliver the goods with the precision and poise expected. Builds and breaks that would make even the most imposing modern day Hatebreed-clone sheepishly slink out of sight, coupled with that classic, straight forward early '90s gloom-ridden hesh trouncing that was the hallmark of the Cleveland scene blare forth. Those factors, combined with the exceptionally harrowing rabid howls and growls emanating from the murky depths of HF's pipes ensure a listening experience beneficial to all. Bust!-Mike Ramek

THE RITCHIE WHITES - *Snitches Get Stiches* (TKO Records 3126 W.Cary St. #303 Richmond, VA 23221) Garagey, snotty, punky rawk n'roll. This kind of music bores me very quickly but if you own more than six shirts with the sleeves cut off this is probably the band you've been searching for. - Oliver Lyons

ROCKET FROM THE CRYPT – "Hot Charity/Cut and Play" EP (Swami) Maybe it is the bustling anticipation of finally hearing the often coveted but never obtained Hot Charity record from San Diego's most prolific punk rock mainstay, RFTC. The nine-song session was originally released on singer/guitarist Speedo's newly formed Swami Records at the outset of the band's affair with a major label. It served as a companion to their inconsistent major label debut, Scream, Dracula, Scream! The concept of releasing an independent record around the same time as a possibly career-making record (they never did "make it big") created the possibility of a real "fuck you" batch of songs. In actuality, Hot Charity isn't much different than Scream; in fact, aside from the raucous "Lorna Doom," it' s pretty much the mellower of the two records. Ah well, the songs still rock, and Rocket has always been known for a seemingly bottomless pit of excellent songs. Such is illustrated by an amazing six-song addition to this CD re-release, the almost forgotten Cut and Play collection which reared its head after Rocket's self-titled, dopey major label sophomore laugh. These six barnstormers came from a depressed and unproductive band at the end of 1999, who were possibly considering early retirement after what has been universally regarded as their worst album. It is nice to have these two batches of songs on one CD. Rocket is known for greatness, yes, but they also have a tendency to kick in significant amounts of throwaway material. Despite any shortcomings in this material, songs like "Poison Eye" from Hot Charity and "If the Birds Could Fly" from Cut and Play are brilliant in their ability to rock and stomp. Swami Records (www.swamirecords.com) - Jason Schreurs

SABIANS - *Beauty for Ashes* (Music Cartel) There were moments on this CD that made me bob my head in total unison to the distortion thick noise from this Oakland, CA, quartet. I found the haunting lyrics of "Via Dolorosa" to be disturbing and powerful: "O where . . . can she be, a mother in agony . . . why did this happen to me . . . watching and waiting in a black sedan there was a poor excuse for a man . . . make the man in the black sedan feel the pain that he has begun." The song is about the abduction of a child, an event that you hope only happens in movies starring Mel Gibson (because then you know there'll be a happy ending.) Musically, the band is a sort of a jam band with instrumental passages that inspire and please at the same time. - Paul Hanson

SACRILICIOUS - *Seven Songs* (New Disorder, 115 Bartlett Street, San Francisco, CA 94110) Oft-harmonic, feedback-fueled hardcore, oozing a decidedly unimpressive array of echoing 'emotive' breaks, and a slight infusion of semi-foreboding crust-tinged gloom riffing. Ultimately marred beyond any vestige of redemption by hellish, unbearably irritating nasal croons that serve to further negate the humdrum musical backdrop against which they are set, this EP reeks of a pervasive mediocrity from beginning to end. The musical counterpart here is not nearly as forceful as it could be, with overly loose, muddled, weak production and musicianship prevalent throughout. Bordering on a hybrid melding of melodic emo-core and crust/hardcore, but accomplishing neither style with any real vestige of noteworthy proficiency, this offering from Sacrilicious is certainly worth avoiding. – Mike Ramek

SALOME'S WISH – "Black Days" EP (1110 East Confederate Ave., Atlanta, GA 30316) ZZZZZZZZZZzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz. Dull, uninspiring, heavily over-produced, commercially oriented pap with no redeeming value. On top of that, it seems about 15 years out of date. - Paul Silver

SANDBOX - *Rocks* (umbilicalrecords.com) There always seems to be a close connection between light hearted guitar punk and bad relationships, and while Sandbox do not offer unique musical visions, there are some moments of fun on Rocks. The trio from Piscataway, New Jersey capture pure sugar-rush exuberance on tracks like "Think With our Sacs" and "Now Those Days," but they simply revisit all too familiar ground with "Waiting Tonight," "I Love You," "This Girl" and "The Ice Cream." I know that a great number of people can identify with sour relationships, and Sandbox come across as down-home, honest guys who simply want to play high energy power punk pop. I honestly hope these guys do well, and Rocks did live up to its name with "Whose Fault" and "What," but the overall sense of the record is too formulaic. I liked it, but this will need a great deal of promotion to rise out of the pool of contemporary acts playing this same style. - Rich Quinlan

JUSTIN SANE - *Life, Love and the Pursuit of Justice* (A-F Records) Is having a solo album punk rock? Doesn't this make Justin Sane (of the political punk group Anti-Flag) the Billy Idol of modern day punk rock? I'm scared. Justin's solo album tries to be Billy Bragg, sounds more like Dashboard Confessional (read: mucho songs about girls) and with Mr. Sane only knowing three chords, the songs tends to run together. But when all is said and done, Justin's solo album has a good pop sense and funny / interesting lyrics, two things that most artists tend to throw away as soon as they pick up an acoustic guitar. My lighter will definitely be in the air when he comes to my town. - Oliver Lyons

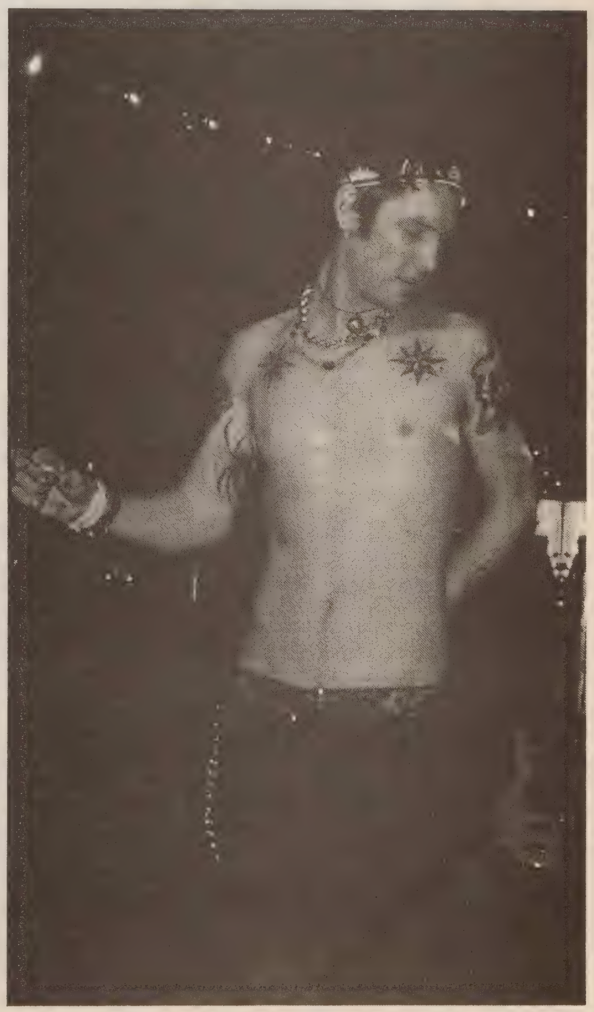
SELBY TIGERS - *The Curse of the Selby Tigers* (Hopeless Records) Oh god, not again. I cannot for the life of me figure out the appeal of this band. The Selby Tigers have this kind of X meets the B-52's thing happening but it just does not work. I think it stems from two main problems; 1) the guitarist refuses to tune and 2) the female singer has one of the worst voices I have ever heard. Barring that, some of the songs could be decent like, "Down in Uppertown" and "You're Off the Project" but due to those two previously mentioned problems they are not. The Selby Tigers really have to work on focusing their sound. Are they trying to be raw, 'in- your- face' type punk band or are they trying to be a quirky, retro-throwback type of band? Together it just sounds like a mess. If the Selby Tigers got it together and kicked the guitarist and the female singer out of the band, they maybe, just maybe, could be an okay band. Then again, is all that work worth it? Maybe they should just break up? Yeah, that's a better answer. They should just break up. - Oliver Lons

SERENE (Arena Rock Recording Co., 242 Wythe Ave., Studio 6, Brooklyn, NY 11211, www.arenarockrecordingco.com) Very mellow, somewhat spacey (or spaced-out) indie pop that's so laid back it nearly put me to sleep. It sounds pleasant enough, but there's just absolutely no energy or conviction behind it. If the band doesn't sound excited about what they're playing, how are we expected to get excited about listening to it? – Paul Silver

SHIRLEY TEMPLE OF DOOM – *Notification of Termination* (Watergate Records, 330 E. 73rd St. #19, New York, NY, 10021) This is a tough one. We all know how personal music can be, and how one person can totally love a band that the next person hates. That said, it would be difficult to find anyone who could name Shirley Temple of Doom among their favorites. It's like trying to find fans of Kings X or Primus; they're out there somewhere, but will they admit to it? These New Yorkers get a hot production sound from Martin Bisi (White Zombie/Sonic Youth/Helmet) and can write just as [ahem] good a funky ballad as [cough] the Red Hot Chili Peppers. The better moments on *Notification of Termination* bring back pleasant, decade-old memories of Faith No More and Living Color, so give Shirley Temple of Doom credit for knowing their chops and keeping their songs relatively tight. The annoyance factor is high, though. Unless the mood is perfect, this is a rough listen. – Jason Schreurs

MISHKA SHUBALY - *To Hell With You* (mishka_shubaly@hotmail.com) There's something endearing that I can't quite put my finger on about Mishka Shubaly. The guy is a punk basso profundo, croaking out nothing but bar room blues and beery broken-hearted ballads in a deep, emotive voice, all swaddled in bottom-heavy production that's heavy on bass and drums with the occasional bit of bluesy lead guitar thrown on top. The obvious reference point is early Tom Waits, although Mishka is still several hundred cartons of cigarettes away from matching Wait's sandpaper croak. Mishka never met a metaphor he didn't like, and his way with lyrics is winning too, even if just about every song is about some dame who did him wrong. You want a good rainy day record that'll help you wallow in misery, start right here. You'll feel better, I promise. – Jim Testa

SLEATER-KINNEY - *One Beat* (Kill Rock Stars)I have always admired Sleater-Kinney's focus on doing music as they saw fit, never caving in the face of trends or abandoning their original determination to produce original, indie-punk rock. Over the years, the band has matured and grown and One Beat may be their finest work yet. Lyrics have always played a central role with this band, but never as powerfully as on "Far Away" and "Combat Rock", two scintillating views of 9/11 America; the first through the eyes of a scared observer from the other coast and the second questioning the rash of post-tragedy unison that borders on dismantling our free speech (Where is the questioning, where is the our protest song?/Since when is skepticism un-American?"). Utilizing a variation of influences and instruments including keyboards and crisp pop styles, One Beat crackles with emotion as drummer Janet Weiss hammers out a beat and Corin Tucker and Carrie Brownstein sing to and with each other, delivering poignant and poetic words. Sleater-Kinney can still rock with anyone, as heard on the rattling "O2," "Funeral Song" and "Light Rail Coyote." This is a band who deserve all the praise they receive for this is brilliant. - Rich Quinlan



The Sign Offs

SICK OF IT ALL - *Live In A Dive* (FAT Wreck Chords PO BOX 193690 San Francisco, CA 94119-9690) Though the production quality is top notch, and the twenty three song-set length is undeniably impressive, my one major gripe with the bulk of this recording, as with virtually every modern SOIA set I have been privy to, is this: too much of the new, and not nearly enough of the old is featured herein. Though the vast majority of relatively recent (Built To Last-era and onward) Sick Of It All material has proven mostly tolerable, and, at times, fairly invigorating, the immediacy and unbridled power of the band's Rev 7"/Blood Sweat and No Tears-era, and the comparatively technical Just Look Around-era unquestioningly towers over the all too sizeable chunk of mediocrity that has subsequently transpired. There's no denying the inherent goodness in the whoa-oh chants of "Good Lookin' Out" (an ever present component of the modern SOIA set, for those not in the know), but the proliferation of other more drab recent material in the band's live forum (spreading like a virus across the Sick Of It All set list with the advent of every new record) is tragic. NYHC classics like "Rat Pack", "My Life", "Friends Like You", the absolutely flooring "Straight Ahead" cover (featuring Craig Ahead, of course), and the all-time greatest mosh-inducing dancfefloor rumbler "Clobberin' Time" make appearances here, but songs of this ilk are in short supply, in the grand scheme of things. To those who might argue that a band cannot hope to survive as a modern entity by solely revisiting their past, it must be noted that until that band in question puts out records of the same caliber as that which came before, they would be best served by giving the dedicated masses what they truly crave. - Mike Ramek

THE SIGN OFFS - *Disaster* (Disaster Records, PO Box 7112, Burbank CA 91510) If you thought Scandinavians were the only ones putting out tight, loud, rock-influenced punk these days, then you've been reading too many mainstream rock mags. Cleveland's Sign Offs, just out of high school, sound like I always wanted the Candy Snatchers to sound – clear, fast, loud, and tight. The Sign Offs' drummer propels the band with faster beats than we're used to in this genre, although he does only seem to know one beat with his foot (is that a double-bass pedal, dude?) Energetic screamy vocals and tight, fast guitars... this is extreme bar rock and one can only imagine a live show to match the 11 rockin' songs on *Disaster*. – Johnny Puke

SILKWORM - *Italian Platinum* (Touch & Go Records, PO Box 25520, Chicago, IL 60625) It's usually recommended that bands put their best songs first on an album, not their worst, so lazy reviewers don't trash the album because of the first cut. The first cut on this album made me think that Silkworm had lost it and turned into some really trashy, bad rock band. Thankfully, I am not a lazy reviewer, and I continued listening. Because a lazy reviewer would miss a good album. The music ranges from quiet, spare songs to richly instrumented ones. "Is She a Sign" is a really cool song that's somewhat sedate and lai d back, but kind of rocks in it's own way. "The Brain" starts out kind of slow but builds in intensity, and has a hint of Steroelab-ness to it. Some of the songs have a hint of country, without being country rock songs. So, all in all, this is not your older sibling's Silkworm. This is a more mature Silkworm, a more dynamic Silkworm. - Paul Silver

SINNERS AND SAINTS – *The Sky Is Falling* (Bridge Nine Records,PO Box 990052, Boston, MA, 02199-0052) - Well lookee here; someone's discovered their old Guns 'N' Roses records. As proof, the song "Like a Suicide" is a dead ringer for Appetite-era Gunners. Straight ahead rock and roll like this probably wouldn' t sound half bad if it was played by ex-members of Faster Pussycat or LA Guns, instead of clean cut New England boys who are fresh from Blood For Blood, Ten Yard Fight and In My Eyes. This kind of balls-out, beer belly rock should be reserved for balding dudes who used to tie bandanas to their microphone stands, but now spend their days elbow deep in car engines, but sounds goofy when coming from hardcore kids who did time on Victory Records. When Sinners and Saints slip into a radio-friendly, Weezer/Foo Fighters vibe, including a horrible Dave Grohl imitation on "The Sky Is Falling," well, the show is over. – Jason Schreurs

SIX MORE MILES - *Veldt* (December Records, PO Box 191, Newark, DE 19715-0191) If you have been looking for well developed, intellectualized music with heart and skill, Six More Miles should be a part of your collection. Recorded only a scant four months after their inception as a band, *Veldt* is a deeply poetic and richly played record, inundated with emotion and true soul. Most of the nine songs are carried by the stirring lyrics of vocalist Dan Gonzalez. Gonzalez's writing style revolves around brief yet complex lyrics that are clearly open for discussion, debate and interpretation, and the words take on greater poignancy when delivered by his haunting voice; as on "Fallen Beneath", where he calmly utters: "I'm in a better place/ Care free and unleashed./I've fallen beneath. /No need for suspicion or treason./Just covered and free." The band effortlessly alters the volume and aggression of their songs, cascading into noise before surrendering to quiet on "Coating" and "All the Chances." While guitarist Darin Clower and drummer Jeff Tirabassi earned indie fame and emo notoriety as members of Walleye, Six More Miles is not treading upon the past. This is not emo. It is, instead, highly intelligent rock and roll as heard on "Downpour" and "Surfacing," two songs that seem to capture early, les glossy REM without simply reproducing that sound. The moody vocals, layered playing and incredible harmonies make this a record that will easily separate itself from the gluttony of repetitive mediocrity currently being released. Highly recommended. - Rich Quinlan

SIXER - *Beautiful Trash* (BYO Records, PO Box 67609, Los Angeles, CA, 90067) - It's hard to get super excited about a band that sounds identical to *Unfun* -era Jawbreaker, but gosh darn it if this Richmond, VA band don't get the feet tapping and the memories flowing. Early Green Day, Avail and even a bit of Ann Beretta (from which Sixer's two guitarists flew the coop) are also prevalent in the sounds on *Beautiful Trash*. The lyrics aren't changing the world anytime soon, with songs like "Truckstop Jesus," "Whiskey Sour," and "American Heartbreak," we're better to tune out and enjoy the simple face value of these tunes. A bit of a southern-fried flavor is the only original ingredient to Sixer's sound, but is also the element that lowers the band's catchy appeal. Oh well, maybe next time they'll just abandon *all* of their own ideas and write a straight Jawbreaker sound-a-like record. It's pretty bad to encourage a band NOT to sound original, but Jawbreaker aren't reforming anytime soon, and it would a more enjoyable listen. – Jason Schreurs

SLICK SHOES (Tooth & Nail Records) This is one of the most solid releases I heard since Shades Apart's latest CD. Slick Shoes are more pop punk, but they prove that they can rock as hard as anyone. "Friday Nite" just begs to be the first single. It's cool, infectious and catchy as all hell! Produced by Neil King (Green Day, Elvis Costello), the music sounds fresh and vital. Slick Shoes would be a welcome addition to any Surf & Skate or Warped Tour. Twelve songs, twelve hits. -Sounds simple but you can hear the hard work and determination that was put into this disc. -Phil Rainone

SMARTY PANTS – "EP Phone Home" (PO Box 7015, Edmond OK 73083) Smarty Pants are a smart, sassy, funny pop-punky band from Oklahoma (of all places!) who skillfully walk that fine line between comedic songwriting and novelty tunes. With song titles like "Shitstorm," "The Day The Iron Sheik Found Out That Wrestling Is Fake," and my favorite, "(That's How You) Make A Mermaid," the boys in Smarty Pants will keep you smiling as you hum along to their infectiously cheery melodies. "Tune In Tokyo" is a frenetic new-wavey rock 'n' roll song that's guaranteed to have you dancing around your bedroom in your underwear. And if that isn't worth the price of an EP, what is? – Jim Testa

SOMEDAY I - *Ref 4* (Owned & Operated Recordings, P.O. Box 2241, Ft. Collins, CO, 80522) More in the vein of good radio rock, another band that stacks up against the likes of Puddle of Mudd and Foo Fighters... NOTE TO BANDS SENDING STUFF TO REVIEW: you might want to skip opening with the pretentious piece that doesn't really rep the rest of your sound (sorry, guys, I was ready to dismiss you for that first track alone--and don't think a critic won't do that in a heartbeat). I'm happy to report that toughing it out past that first track was well worth it: good playing, good rock guitar compositions, and bass and drum work that is subtle yet tasteful. Tracks "CRS Disease" and "Concrete" rock! The only thing that got a little old was the lyricist's need to keep second-guessing his place as a musician/writer (i.e. "My voice is wrecked, but I'm not done screaming yet - it's a shame I lost it before I learned how to sing"). Please...the guy sings well. Musicians hating that they're musicians went out with grunge--if you don't like playing, sit down and shut the fuck up, please. It's even worse in this case because Someday I are, in fact, quite talented, making it hard to swallow the self-bashing sessions. Guys, keep the muse that writes the tunes, fire the one with the woe-is-me-I'm-a-musician lyrics, and please come back with a record that decimates the competition. Buy if you know you strum well and are, for some reason, disgruntled about it. - Mike Chant

SONGS FOR EMMA – *Red Lies and Black Rhymes* (Broken Rekids, PO Box 460402, San Francisco, CA, 94146-0402) – Much like his songs' subject matter, the ragged vocals of Tommy Strange have a human quality that cannot be ignored. Strange (ex-Strawman) has sandpaper grit to his vocals that puts him in the same territory as Frankie Stubbs (Leatherface) or Chad, the guy who used to sing in The Strike. Songs For Emma actually have a lot in common with the latter band, including personally political lyrics and a ska/reggae influence. This band also features Mike Millett, the ex-guitar player from A.P.P.L.E., and Craig O'Hara, who fronted Character Builder and wrote "The

Philosophy of Punk." The strength on Red Lies and Black Rhymes lies not in the band's musical prowess or abundance of catchy songs, but in Strange's ability to tell deeply affecting stories about our world. It's refreshing to know exactly what he is talking about in his lyrics, and that these songs are based on current political and social happenings, something which makes them all the more effective in delivering important messages. -- Jason Schreurs

SONIC YOUTH - *Murray Street* (DGC/Geffen) Most SY fans have been complaining that Sonic Youth has been making the same record over and over again for the last decade. Some critics laud them for their consistency; others miss the adventurous sense of experimentation that defined their earlier work (and which now seems relegated to the band's many side projects.) *Murray Street* – recorded in downtown New York City in the aftermath of September 11 - seems very much a return to form, combining the basic pop/rock SY sound of albums like *Goo* and *Washing Machine* with extended noise jams (ably complemented by new member Jim O'Rourke's tape loops and keyboard parts.) "Disconnection Notice," for instance, seems a perfect allegory for how many New Yorkers felt after watching the Trade Center fall, while still pushing plenty of other emotional buttons with Thurston Moore's laconic vocals. Maybe I'm just still caught up in post-9/11 NYC jingoism, or maybe the band just got inspired out of its complacency, but this is the first Sonic Youth CD I've actually gone back and listened to repeatedly in a very long time. – Jim Testa

SPARTA -- Wiretap Scars (Dreamworks) Sparta is one of the two bands that formed seemingly the day that At The Drive In broke up, although interestingly, the wordy major-label presskit that came with this disc doesn't say a word about the members' previous endeavors. Less spastic and more collegiate than ATDI, Sparta seems influenced by Quicksand and especially Fugazi (they should be paying Fugazi royalties for the song "Mye.") Produced by corporate punk big-shot Jerry Finn (Blink 182, Green Day,) the sound here is big and lush. They're good, but not the next big thing. -- Johnny Puke

SPEEDEALER - *Second Sight* (Palm, 601 W. 26th St., 11th Fl. NY, NY 10001) Metal lives! I'm not talking Korn, Coal Chamber "nu-metal", I mean the old stuff, and it lives in the form of Speedealer. Produced by Jason Newsted, (I see, you quit Metallica and become a producer?) Speedealer borrow ideas from bands ranging from Megadeth to SOD and in the process release a pretty cool collection of well tread metal riffs that will rise above the pack because the playing is crisp, energized and tight. With a mountainous wall of sound dominating tracks like "Days of Red" and "Infinitesimal", *Second Sight* (which I believe was also the name of a Frehley's Comet record) alternates between thick as mud grooves a la Black Sabbath and pure speed, all the while peppering most songs with tempo shifts and flashes of impressive technical ability. There are a few gems here, including the furious "Kill Myself Tonight" and the closing "Machinations", which are only two of the songs I hope Metallica hear before they release their next disc, for they could pick up a tip or two about getting back to playing metal in its original sense. I was also taken by "Fractured" and "Slowly, Burning...Alive". There were moments when you are unsure if the band really wants to reinvent the metal wheel or if this simply fun loving nostalgia put on disc, but by the crushing, concluding seconds, I was convinced that these guys meant business and while they may take some of us back to our high-school metalhead days, these guys do not want to live in the past, but rather, plan on pushing metal forward. Nice job. - Rich Quinlan

SPIRALING *Transmitter* (www.spiraling.net) When you were a kid, searching through the racks of sheet music in instrument stores for transcriptions of the songs you loved on the radio? (I'm assuming you're all in bands.) Remember how it felt finding the sheet music to, say, Billy Squier's *Emotions In Motion*, excitedly opening it, only to find that there really wasn't anything in those songs worthy of elaborate transcription? Remember how paltry it looked on the page, and remember how cheap you felt? Future fans of Spiraling won't ever have to encounter that problem. Tom Brislin writes from the kind of chord vocabulary we haven't seen in East Coast indie rock in years, and his catchy, intricate, and nuanced melodies seem to beg for transcription: his is an intensely musical act, comparable in its painstaking attention to harmonic detail to *Duke*-era Genesis. Brislin himself is a dexterous, imaginative organist and synthesist, able to execute flawless runs and swirling, electrifying arpeggios with precision. *Transmitter* highlights his playing, but it never entirely dominates these are well-balanced and carefully crafted mixes, radio-amicable if not entirely friendly, welcoming and generous, defiantly quirky. A few of the tracks are straight-up, successful rockers, particularly "(get your own) Holy Grail" and the self-deprecating "This Is The Road." Those are fun singalong numbers, but I'm most compelled by the version of Brislin who immerses himself in sonic mayhem via his analog synths, best evidenced here by the terrific title cut and the superb, dizzying "Excellent Body." But "Lightning Strikes" will probably be the runaway favorite here – built on an ingenious organ progression and a mesmerizing analog synthesizer hook, this is the kind of huge, ambitious pop song that used to be a staple on the FM airwaves (and surely will be again, and soon). Asia spent ten years and millions of dollars of David Geffen's money trying to write songs like these. When the prog-rock revival finally hits mainstream radio, expect Brislin and Spiraling to be at the forefront. Tris McCall

THE SPITVALVES *Movin' On* (Resurrection AD) An Orlando, Florida-based seven-piece, the Spitvalves have all the instrumentation of a ska band without the regimented songwriting. With more hardcore styled vocals than Less Than Jake, the Spitvalves are a punk band with horns. All the songs are upbeat and energetic and generally not as monotonous as your average ska-rock outfit. More regrettable is the band's cliched attempt at hip hop ("1, 2, 3, 4,") very Spinal Tap without the irony.

THE STANDARD · *August* (Touch And Go, PO Box 25520, Chicago IL 60625) Contrary to popular belief, the great Northwestern rock & roll scene didn't disappear with Kurt Cobain's tragic suicide, Soundgarden's break-up or Pearl Jam's retreat from fame. Artists and bands like Elliott Smith, Built To Spill, Calvin Johnson and Quasi continue to carry the creative torch for a scene that won't go quietly into that good night. The Standard is a perfect example of the vitality of Northwest rock, the Portland, Oregon band stretching out with *August*, their sophomore effort, delivering a strong kick-in-the-pants to a slumbering indie rock world. *August* is a superb and finely crafted collection of songs, the band lessening its dependence on guitar-driven rock to incorporate a more melodic and electronic-augmented orientation to its sound. The band's maturity shines through on *August*, Jay Clarke's subtle keyboard contributions strengthened by the addition of Gail Buchanan on keyboards and guitar. Tim Putnam's vocals are expressive and perfectly suited to the material, dimensions of emotional fragility and moody introspection added to the band's aggressive instrumental approach. The material on *August*, beautiful, muscular songs like the bittersweet "A Year Of Seconds" or the haunting "Angelicate" are easily the equal of better-known and hyped bands like Sparta or the Promise Ring. Honest, intelligent and challenging, the Standard have delivered a creative tour de force in *August*, easily one of the best American indie albums that you'll find released this year. (www.thestandardsite.com) – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

THE STARTING LINE - *Say It Like You Mean It* (Drive -Thru Records) Simple, sweet and sour lyrics combined with melodic, pop/punk crunching chords, are what makes The Starting Line different. On "Given The Chance" they sing, "The minute before we play I'm pacing and waiting anxiously. I can't wait to hit the stage and say hello to Jersey." Actually, they could probably substitute any state, but they strike a chord of unity between the band and their fans. Songs you can easily relate to like "The Drama Summer," or "Left Coast Envy," are fun to listen and sing along to. The Starting Line were featured on this year's Warped Tour (Drive -Thru had its own stage). This is one of those discs that will remind you of that time in your life when you first heard it, years down the road - it's that good! - Phil Rainone

STEP SISTER –*Autopilot Stuck On Get Down* (Smog Veil, www.) This Cleveland, Ohio band kind of reminds me of Nine Pound Hammer or Zeke. Sounds like 80's hardcore played by a bucnha good ol' boys who like their Jim Beam and classic rock. -Rick K.

THE STEREO - *Rewind and Record* (Fueled by Ramen, PO Box 12563, Gainesville, FL 32604) The Stereo is one man with a vision; that man is Jamie Woolford and that vision is to return to the days of FM rock and roll before genres mixed, styles clashed and radio stations became corporate clones of one another. While not always my particular cup of musical tea, The Stereo play with an undeniable warmth and irrefutable honesty. With piano and string programming heard throughout, this is not your older brother's indie rock. Gone are the sloppy chords and oft ill-delivered vocals that were endearing for many of us; that has been replaced by Woolford's meticulous attention to detail and knack for writing insightful, cleaver and forthright lyrics that approach self-deprecation without ever becoming too self-indulgent. Additionally, the backing musicians here who help him produce Rewind and Record are all solid, including brother Ben on guitar, but none more so than the siren-voiced Katie Riemann who shines on "Stop Breathing." There were momets when The Stereo were a bit too conservative for my liking, including "Too Little, Too Late" and "Two Week Notice". However, Woolford proves himself to be a man of many skills, and I was admittedly swept up in the good natured force of "Don't Say Uncle" and "Have I Paid My Debt to Minneapolis." This is an impressive release from a band that boiled itself down to one member to sound bigger and better than ever. - Rich Quinlan

STILL BREATHING – *September* (Solid State Records, PO Box 12698, Seattle, WA 98111, solidstate.com) Female-fronted death-like Christ-oriented metal with horribly one-dimensional lyrics, which attempt to engage the listener in philosophical conundrums, but succeed only in pointing towards the hollow relativism of an unintellectual approach to religion. Religious thought is complex - these folks ought to read some Kirkegaard or Nietzsche, get back to us in a few years with a weighty poetics. Honestly, I've heard more nuanced thought patterns burning steam at 4th grade Sunday School. For example, the following quote, taken from their web-site, is about as compelling as Patrick Swayze's spiel in Donnie Darko and seems, kind of, to have been inspired by it: "Life is full of endless possibilities. We all pick and choose our fates, from important, earth-shattering, life altering decision making down to what color of socks we're going to wear on any given morning. Ultimately, we decide whether or not to enjoy the gift of life that we have been blessed with- surmounting all obstacles, or to wallow in our own self-doubt, self-pity and the selfish escapism of many illicit pursuits." Vapid shit wrapped in a death-metal sheen or shadow, remains vapid shit indeed. -Brandon Stosuy

STRIKING DISTANCE - *The Fuse Is Lit* (Bridge 9 Records, PO Box 990052, Boston, MA 02199-0052) Washington, D.C.'s Striking distance have finally come into their own, following a string of relatively strong releases, most notably the stalwart "March To Your Grave" LP. Elaborating on the positively no-frills late-80s hard edged Raw Deal-esque sound and feel generated on early endeavors, Striking Distance have both compacted their sound into more succinct, structurally sound blasts of unadulterated tension and unrest, and have also drastically magnified the bombastic rupturing generated therein. Stellar production abound, the appeal of this band so vehemently intent on shrugging any vestige of down tuned E chord machismo, spirit of '88 rehash, or poetic pretense for a staggering, breakdown-laden string of anti-scene/anti-image rants, and social/societal mishap-oriented tirades, should be obvious. *Brutal* in the truest sense of the word, Striking Distance is a straight up hardcore band, and nothing more. From the heart pounding intensity of the abrupt, opening rallying cry that is "Fight Their Words" to the desperate, vicious tempo-shifts and chord pummeling of the not-waving-but drowning "Find A Way", this stellar outfit, in its forcible simplicity of presentation, is able to elicit the fundamental essence of that which makes hardcore, at its best, so visceral and vital. Included at the end of this CD is a nicely documented, well preserved CBs set (which I had the pleasure to witness first hand) that spans a sizeable selection of the band's earlier material. – Mike Ramek

SUNDAY'S BEST - *The Californian* (Polyvinyl Record Co., PO Box 7140, Champaign IL 61826-7140, www.polyvinylrecords.com) This is a serious departure for the folks at Polyvinyl Records. This ain't no emo record, that's for sure. It sounds like PolyVinyl is trying to become kind of the Epitaph Records of the midwest, watering down the music they put out in order to get acceptance from commercial radio. This is fairly lame, mellow, over-produced rock music. I was very disappointed, as I was expecting something with alot more energy, more intensity. - Paul Silver

SUPERDRAG - *Last Call For Vitriol* (Arena Rock Recording Company) Tennessee's finest are back with album number four, in some ways their strongest to date. Superdrag's still writing should-be power-pop classics, though also tries out a little 70's country balladry on "Safe & Warm" and Skynyrd-esque rock on closer "Drag Me Closer To You." "Vitriol" may not be the angry record "In The Valley Dying Stars" was or half as experimental as "Head Trip In Every Key," but it's undoubtedly great and worth your money. -Darren Paltrowitz

SWINGADELIC - *Organized!* (www.swingadelic.com) I first caught on to these cats (big, 13 piece band), a few years ago when Retro-Swing was blossoming. Swingadelic offered a little more to genre. As on their new release, there's swing, rock, jazz, and the coolest organ vibe this side of Booker T. & the MG's (courtesy of Don Militello & Tom Stinson). "Get On The Right Track" throws this disc into overdrive, with the band's tight swing groove. Swingadelic also has a unique feel for the Blues. "Chicken, Beer and Fifty Dollars," "Country Girl," & "Bloodshot Eyes" are all on the money, and give you the feeling of being in smoky, dark club with a hot musical vibe. Coolest of the cool are "Spanish Grease," "You Dig? You Dog," & "Let The Good Times Roll." "Spanish Grease" dives headfirst into a little Salsa, and Swingadelic digs up a tasty tidbit from Santana ("No One To Depend On"). "You Dig? You Dog" is swing that has swagger, thanks to Swingadelic's smoldering, swing/blues chops. "Let The Good Times Roll" closes out the disc. It's hot, upbeat and leaves you wanting more, more, more! Buy the disc, see Swingadelic live, they're the real deal! - Phil Rainone

SYBARITE *Placement Issues* (Temporary Residence Ltd., PO Box 22910, Baltimore, MD 21203) Xian Hawkins is a Brooklyn-based composer electroniqué. He also goes by the name Sybarite. Xian has recently joined the 4AD family of blokes and *Placement Issues* is sort of a farewell collection of out of print and hard to find singles. These 13 warm melodies somehow never really seem synthetic. Sybarite has quite a knack for sounding rich and very textual, yet maintaining a solid minimalism throughout; and all the cracks, bleeps and tonal pops are hauntingly familiar to anyone bopping about a metropolitan area. If you're picky about your ambient, electronic mood swings, it should be duly noted: this is not the one dimensional electronica that grows stale and merely serves to reflect the current rave "cool-out" fashion. It's kinda timeless, in a fast-paced weekend world. Greg Matherly

TEN FOOT POLE - *Bad Mother Trucker* (Victory Records) Ten Foot Pole's music has an upbeat attitude with fast paced melodies. They recently played at Krome in South Amboy with Voodoo Glow Skulls & River City Rebels. It was hard to tell who was the opener, and who was the headliner. For a young band, Ten Foot Pole's set was tight, and the band had a lot of fun on stage. "Bad Mother Trucker" has the live feel of their stage show. The music will grab your attention, and the lyrics have a social conscious. The clarity of songs like "Plastic," "Do It Again," & "Shelter," will give you a good idea of their love of songwriting and performing. You'll get a rush of energy and passion listening to these infectious pop/punk tunes with edgy lyrics and crunchy guitars. Their record, like their live show gives you the feeling that they're having as mush fun playing as you are listening! - Phil Rainone

TEKULVI - *In Recognition of Your Significant Accomplishments* (Divot, PO Box 14061, Chicago, IL 60614, www.divotrecords.com) Wow, this is an awesome CD. Tekulvi are the ultimate Chicago band for the new milllennium. They combine various styles that have recently found favor in the Windy City, such as post-rock/jazz style of bands like Tortoise and others, the medwestern variety of emo practiced by such bands as Braid, Cap'n Jazz, and Gauge, and a dose of math-rock. The result may not look good in print, but in sounds really great in the ear. It gets raucous, it flows smoothly, it's harmonious, and it's dissonant. It's also only a too short CD EP, clocking in at only about 25 minutes. I am definitely looking forward to hearing more from this band. Recommended. - Paul Silver

THE TEMPS - *Soon We'll Be Gone* (Wild Warthog Records, 419 Main St., #317, Huntington Beach CA 92648) Old time rock and roll is back boys and girls; where bands like Oasis fell flat, the Temps step in with a style that borrows from the Stones and the Who, as well as more recent pop punk stylings. The record has a few bumps along the way, but Soon We'll Be Gone is worth your time due to the melodious tones of Matt Mitchell, who shines on "How Do You Love" and "More." As great as Mitchell is, he is completely upstaged by Jennifer Silverman on "Lil' Devil," a gorgeous anthem that is truly the centerpiece of the disc. My favorite came late, with the roaring next to last effort, "Born to Suck," the angriest, most aggressive song of the ten; this was a bit of a surprise here for it was far more volumous than the poppy, throwback sound that dominated the majority of the work. To their credit, the band switches musical gears quite well and often, as the sullen "Goodbye" and the more gentle "Gofer Dreams" proved. This was predominately earcandy, but a sweet surprise awaits here. - Rich Quinlan

THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS - *No!* (Idlewild Recordings P.O. Box 110535 Williamsburg NY 11211) This engagingly idiosyncratic "what the hell, try it, do it" experimental novelty duo have been specializing in tantalizingly off-beat and boldly unclassifiable music for twenty years going. Hence, it should come as no surprise that the ever-unpredictable pair of John Flansburgh and John Linnell have finally got around to recording a bona fide children's album. And it's without a doubt one of the oddest, wackiest, most incredibly (and wonderfiully) nutso and musically diverse kiddie albums you'll ever have the pleasure to h ear. The chronically kooky Brooklyn berserkos' playfully quirky sensibility fits this genre so well that it's more than a tad uncanny, but still loads of wiggy, off-the-wall, go-for-broke loopy fun just the same. The lyrics are marvelously redolent of Dr. Seuss in peak imaginatively batty form, the loosey-goosey arrangements are as catchy, lively, and jubilant as one could hope, the boys' nasally vocals exude their usual ingratiatingly off-center charm, and the whole thing titter-totters from one choice flaky track to another with delightfully wonky abandon. A splendidly screwball treat. – Joe Wawyrzniak

THINKING DAY RALLY – "Into The Blue Room" EP (Brave Noise Records, PO Box 2268 Brandon, Fl 33509-2268). Delicate vocals, piano tracks, and a slow mounting catharsis are musical themes in vogue at the moment as the hardcore and indie kids of yesterday try to sound grand and

What I did on my summer vacation

JIM TESTA - "Songs My Father Never Sang" 5-Song CD-EP (Jersey Beat Music)

For 20 years and 72 issues now, Jim Testa's personality has infused each and every page of *Jersey Beat*, one of the longest-running and best fanzines in the rock underground (whatever the heck that is). If you're reading this, you no doubt have a fair idea of what Jim is like: Rabidly enthusiastic in his devotion to D.I.Y. music; romantic in the best sense of that overused word; devoted to championing the outsider, the misfit, the original, the geek—personalities that have always given us the best rock 'n' roll—and kind and generous to fault. (I mean, he didn't even get mad at *me* for missing the deadline for the big anniversary issue, for which this review is most certainly not an alumni make-good.)

Now Jim has given us his solo musical debut, and guess what? It's pure Jim Testa, just like *Jersey Beat*. *Caveat emptor*. Jim has been a near and dear friend of mine for 20 years now, but that wouldn't stop me from telling the truth about his music-making—just ask me what I think about his editing. (HA! And a note to the editor: Don't you *DARE* change a word of this review, buddy.) If this 5-song E.P. sucked, trust me: I'd tell you.

But I honestly have no qualms whatsoever in reviewing it and recommending it as cause for you and your *dinero* to part ways, because suck it most certainly does not. More or less a genre unto himself, Jim's music falls somewhere between the naively sweet nostalgia of Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers (post-garage) and the sardonic, sarcastic, but ever-hummable anthems of teenage woe delivered by Screeching Weasel at its pop-punk best—and it's interesting to note that former Weasel guitarist John "Jughead" Pierson has also taken a turn toward "acoustic punk," though both Jim and Juggie define that term very differently than, say, Dashboard Confessional.

Speaking of that group, the earnest, soul-baring honesty of the lyrics could be called "emo" by a young reviewer lacking in historical perspective. But the Vagrant roster certainly didn't invent personal tales of one's turbulent teens—heck, that's also been a part of rock from the very beginning—and there's much more humor inherent in Jim's accounts of "post-boomer angst" than there is in your average emo nerd-boy's. As Jim explains in his unsurprisingly witty and illuminating liner notes, "Jean Shepherd" pays homage to that wry Midwestern nostalgist who was once a staple on talk radio, though you young 'uns will probably only know him as the narrator and auteur behind that ubiquitous seasonal favorite, *A Christmas Story*. (Heck, that's the only way /know him—Uncle Jim even has a few years on *me*—though I do have a copy of *In God We Trust: All Others Pay Cash*, one of Shepherd's books, that I borrowed permanently from Mr. Testa about eight years ago. Um, you don't want it back now, do you, Jim?)

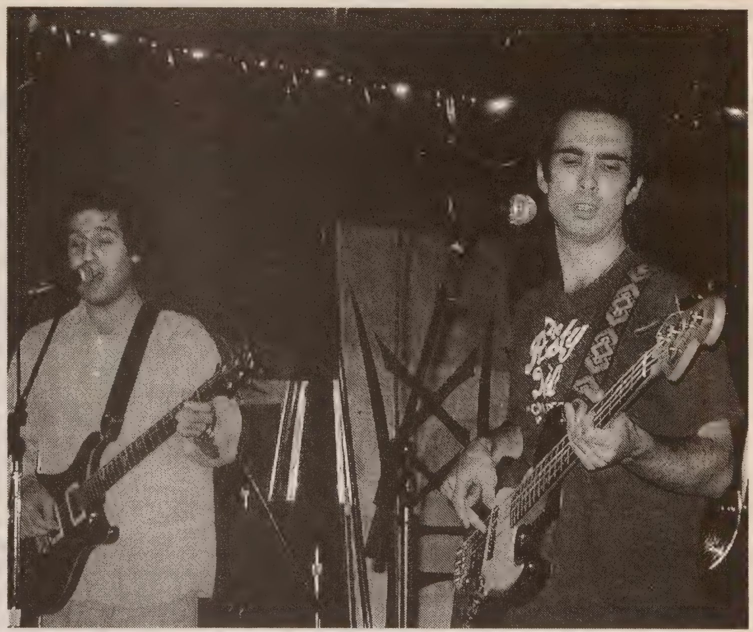
"Incredible Shrinking Man (I Love You)" is an endearingly goofy tune that uses a B-movie sci-fi metaphor to describe adolescent awkwardness. The same subtext runs through "I Was A Teenage Frankenstein," in which Jim confesses, "Remember 1978, I didn't look too great/I had braces on my teeth, and pimples on my face." In the end, though, the geek gets his revenge on the high-school hipsters because his life in the musical underground is ultimately much more vibrant and fulfilling than the middle-class suburban zombiehood that has befallen his former nemeses. No need for therapy to right childhood wrongs when you wind up having the last laugh, eh, Jim?

The more barbed side of Jim's wit comes through on "Bad New York Band," in which the constant listener and perpetual clubgoer gets his revenge on three decades' worth of hopelessly abysmal opening acts. ("You're a bad New York band and nobody likes you/You won't go away but then again you don't have to/Maybe you've got no talent or taste/But in Manhattan there's always a place/For another bad New York band.") Take *that*, Mouldy Peaches.

Lyrically, the only tune that falters is "There Used to Be A Ballpark," and Jim didn't write it. (Joe Raposo, author of "It Ain't Easy Being Green" for Kermit the Frog, penned this one for Frank Sinatra.) But then I never *have* understood Jim's obsession with baseball. Even this eulogy for Ebbetts Field succeeds musically, however. As Jim hammers away at his acoustic axe (that's the punk part of the proceedings) and delivers his endearingly nasal, Bob Dylan-imitating-Loudon Wainwright III-with-a-cold vocals, producer Tris McCall tastefully colors these gonzo coffeehouse ditties with straightforward rhythms, touches of cheesy synthesizer and fiery lead guitar, and some nice garagey organ. If I have to quibble, I'd say that next time, I'd like to hear a little *more* garage in the production and a little less studio slickness—it's sort of like this zinester-turned-musician made his *Numbers With Wings* before his *Drums Along the Hudson*.

That's a reference to New Jersey's late, lamented Bongos, kiddies, one of the bands that prompted Jim to give himself over to this whole rock-roll thang lo those many years ago. At that time, he opted to write about music rather than making it himself. Despite a fun stint in the mid-'80s with the Love Pushers (a band in which I was also a member), it took another 15 years for him to finally go solo as a singer-songwriter. Now that he has, I can only say that it was well worth the wait. Jim Testa may have been a teenage Frankenstein and a twenty- and thirty-something fanziner. But he may soon be best known as a middle-aged folk-punk songsmith of no small wit and wisdom. — Jim DeRogatis

the vitamen



THE VITAMEN – *FUN* (www.thevitamen.com) They don't try to overwhelm you sonically. Nobody in this group is addicted to heavy wattage, and frontman and guitarist Jesse Blockton doesn't tend to play big chords, favoring instead the kind of brittle, complicated instrumental parts that will inevitably get this group compared to Steely Dan. No, The Vitamen like to clear space for their lyrics, and since Blockton is also loath to shout, that means pulling back on verses and limiting instrumental monkeying-about. But have no doubt, they're going to get your attention anyway. Three guys singing lines such as "I'm afraid if I lived alone/I would rip all the skin off my dick" and "was every girl on earth molested/or am I just bad in bed?" in tight harmony will tend to accomplish that. Blockton is the Philip Roth of NYC indie rock, a writer grappling with questions about masculinity, urban life, and the relationship between the two, steeped in a classic tradition (in this case, seventies radio rock and singer-songwriters) and completely uninterested in chasing trends. Like Roth, Blockton can be potty-mouthed, but he compensates by spinning surprisingly moving narratives out of occasionally crass threads. It further helps that the group's feel for rock song composition is unquestionably masterful. *Fun*, their debut, consists of 17 songs recorded cheaply on four-track, presented humbly and without much studio polish. Nevertheless, at least eleven of these ought to permanently penetrate the consciousness of any close listener, particularly the breathy, touching "I Can't Say It", "Dramatic" (I court the horror of the Vitamen by suggesting it sounds like an outtake from Workingman's Dead, but I mean it as the highest complement possible), bassist Matt Hyams's absurdly catchy "Pretty Little Secret" and "Please Show Me The Way", and "The Truth", Blockton's devastating defense of dishonesty. *Fun* presents the Vitamen's ideas cogently and courageously, allowing their arguments and worldview to unfold at an easily assimilable pace. There may be better locally released full-lengths this year (though I certainly can't think of any), but there won't be any as immediate, coherent, or moving, and those qualities will always trump slick professionalism and the lure of a big sound. – Tris McCall

emotive. While there's a general momentum towards such an aesthetic, only a handful of bands seem capable of nailing this sound down (i.e. check out the Pinq review in this issue). TDR is reminiscent of Seam, stars of the indie underground in the early 90's, as this record can be lumped in the precarious "this-sound-was-interesting-ten-years-ago" category. The hidden track contains a Pixies cover, another tired cliché. I mean, who hasn't covered a Pixies song at one point or another? -David Gracon

TIGER MOUNTAIN (www.tigermountain.tv) A bit more Mick Jagger solo than Rolling Stones, Tiger Mountain play a radio-friendly brand of 70's pop/rock. Songs like "Song #3" even have a Who-esque element. But these songs just don't have enough bite for me, and from what I hear, the radio isn't ready for a band like this whose rock structures are so traditional and thus dated by today's standards. That's a shame, too, because this stuff beats Creed any day and it ten times more comprehensible than the Strokes. – Johnny Puke

TIME IN MALTA - *A Second Engine* (Equal Vision Records, PO Box 14, Hudson, NY 12534, www.equalvision.com) This album's opening cut, "This is Our Voice," is an awesome one. It's powerful, mature hardcore. There's intensity and technique. It's what I would expect from truly good hardcore. But the second track doesn't back up the first one. It's just heavy "alternative" rock music. After a couple of heavy alt-rock tunes, "Dissolve" just hammered me. It fuses hardcore, math and emo together seamlessly into something unbelievable, something incredible, something I wish there was more of in the other songs on this album. "This Revolution" comes close; though it's closer to classic hardcore of the 90s, at least it's not just alt-rock. "Washed Out" is a heavy emo track that I really liked alot, too. There's various levels of how commercially oriented the music is, but there's always intensity. This is one that I'm gonna keep in my collection and listen to again. - Paul Silver

TOKYO ROSE - *Chasing Fireflies* (www.allaboutrecords.com) Tokyo Rose played one of the smaller stages on the Camden leg of the Warped Tour. Based out of New Brunswick, they attracted a few stragglers at first, but by the end of their set you would have thought they had played the main stage, by the size of the crowd and their enthusiasm! "Right Through Your Teeth," "Clean Break," & the title cut, got everyone's attention, that was in earshot. Their music is a combination of pop, punk, & emo, but they don't lean heavily on any particular genre. Listening to "Chasing Fireflies," you'll hear wholly accessible songs, that are as abrasive as a lawnmower. They don't speculate about love ("I Love You...Too"), they get right to the heart of the matter, and rock your brains out along the way! - Phil Rainone

TRIAL BY FIRE - *Ringing In The Dawn* (Jade Tree, 2310 Kenwynn Road, Wilmington, DE 19810, jadetree.com) On its most visceral level, Ringing In The Dawn hits and crashes with an intense corporeality that causes foot taping, chest pounding, spastic dances, beads of sweat, dislocation. I was happy to discover, too, that when I moved beyond my attraction to the outside sheen of boyish hyper-activity, I found myself climbing further towards an intellectually legit appreciation of the band. The lyrics aren't trite or reactionary, and allow for an additional layer of intrigue absent from intellectually wimpy punk. It's sort of pointless to quote lyrics as an example of the band's strength or prowess because it's the context - how the words mix with the music and ringing around it - that make anything work, but hearing Jason Yawn shout “dead routine,” “we must not rest,” “free yourself,” or “call it submission” is as rousing as any anarchist sermon you'll read anywhere, and admittedly more fun than Bookchin. -Brandon Stosuy

TRIPSIDE – "Tomorrow" EP (www.tripsidemusic.com) Long Island's Tripside – most of them too young to drink or vote yet – make an impressive debut with this 6-song EP. They mix a strong dose of youthful romanticism with a little of Incubus' jumpy post-funk freneticism (and Tiger Beat-ready good looks,) a lot of Eddie Vedder-ish vocal gymnastics, and zippy pop-punk guitar solos. I like the fact that they look at music as an aerobic workout; all that energy keeps them from wallowing in teen angst clichés like The Calling. They need to outgrow the Pearl Jam-isms but keep an eye out, I have a feeling you'll be hearing from these kids. – Jim Testa

US RAIL - *Who Am I Today?* (theband@us-rail.com) DIY lives! If you cannot appreciate ten songs of folk cum punk rock in eighteen minutes, then the problem lies within you because this is great and I am as shocked as anyone that I likes this as much as I did. With riffs that range from being reminiscent of the Beatles "Norwegian Wood ("Hole in the Wall") to Nirvana's "Aneurysm" ("She Said"), this completely home schooled project is pure enjoyment. The raucous noise of "Germ" and the sterling melody of "100 Cigarettes" makes this a brilliant, albeit too brief, record. Blending Americana instrumentation, i.e., harmonica and banjo, with more rough around the edges song crafting, US Rail is a refreshing no-frills blend of raw rock and roll with an earnesty that shines through each effort. "Grind Like a Girl" and "Mechanic's Grip" show off the vocal skills of both Aaron DeLarosa and Beth Slack, proving that these singers have natural abilities, for there are certainly no studio tricks or enhancements of any kind on this release. Theband has until this point relegated itself to performances at open mike nights and small clubs, but hopefully enough people latch on to one of their home generated CD-R's and help ease this band out of the shadows. This was a great find. - Rich Quinlan

THE USED (Reprise Records) Ballsy, powerful, and musically enriching, best describes this Utah based emo band. Vocalist Bert McCracken helps focus the band's music with his raging, passionate style. His range is continually being expanded and as each song folds into the next, the band's creative juices unfold. With some of the tightest musicianship that I've heard in a long time, The Used music will grab your attention right from the start! You'll look forward to the next song for the music and lyrics, both of which are top notch on their self title album. The songs (check "Maybe Memories," "Poetic Tragedy," or " Noise And Kisses"), range from anthems to ballads with noisey, but hook-laden melodies. The video "Box Full of Sharp Objects," gives the band a more creative outlet. I don't want to give the plot away, but it captures a good portion of what The Used are about. - Phil Rainone

GENE VINCENT AND THE BLUE CAPS - *Bluejean Bop* & *Gene Vincent And His Blue Caps* (Capitol) Everyone knows "Be-Bop-A-Lula". Even my son Steve use to sing it when he was about 4 (we started him at a young age)! Well, here's Gene's first two records that helped solidify rock & roll in its infancy, with the Rockabilly that inspired some of today's artists who are carrying on the tradition (Reverend Horton Heat, Go Cat Go, Josie Kueuzer, and a whole slew of contemporary punk bands.) I was surprised to hear Vincent cover The Righteous Bros.' "Unchained Melody." It was more romantic and less orchestrated (Phil Spector, with his famous "Wall Of Sound," produced the Righteous Bros. version). Listening to songs like "Pink Thunderbird," "Jezebel," "Cruisin,'" and the rest of this 2 disc set is a wild, wonderful tribute to Gene and The Blue Caps. The bonus cuts include first takes, B-sides, and songs you'll just freak out listening to like, "Five Days, Five Days," "Well, I Knocked Him, Bim Bam," and of coarse, the rockinest daddy of 'em all, "Be-Bop-A-Lula." - Fireball Phil Rainone

The Vines **Photo by Laura Young (modernage.org)**

THE VINES - *Highly Evolved* (Capitol) I hope this isn't made into a fad like they did with retro swing. Don't get the wrong idea, I loved it (and still do), but they put a couple of swing bands (Cherry Poppin' Daddies & Brian Setzer Orch) on commercial radio for a few months, and then lost interest. There were dozens of bands that should have also been given airplay (excuse me while I climb down off my soap box). OK, less raving about what could have been, and more about The Vines! They are a massively talented quartet from Sydney, Australia. Of the new garage rock bands (including The Hives, Strokes, & let's not forget The Mad Daddy's), the Vines are the most ear friendly of all the major label contenders. *Highly Evolved* possesses both irresistible melodies (even The Troggs' "Love Is All Around," slowed down), matched to feeedback-laced rock that kicks the shit out of just about anything on the radio these days. If you wanna know which songs are the best, just check the back of the CD case. - They all are! The Vines have been around for 6 years,. I think it was worth the wait! - Phil Rainone

VIRGIN STEELE - *Hymns to Victory* (Noise Records) Whoa, what a mixed bag of a release this is! On one hand, you have power metal anthems like "Flakmes of Thy Power" that rock with tons of double-bass and delicately mixed keyboards that add to the guitar riffs. Then you get to track ten, the previously unreleased "Saturday Night", and you wonder who slopped in a Poison CD with its ultra-cheesy "Saturday night/ It's all right/ Hold on tight/ Let's go!" Repulsive. This is a good band, that released this CD probably for their fans. Crappy songs like "Saturday Night" should never have seen the CD press. This song should have been one of those songs that the band plays at the end of a gig when they are feeling silly. The tracks that surround this crap, "The Burning of Rome" and the epic "Noble Savage" (the lost early mix) sounds decent. They kind of make up for "Saturday Night" so if you're curious how a band can mix Manowar and Poison on the same release, this is for you. Otherwise, this is for diehard fans. - Paul Hanson

WAXWING - *Nobody Can Take What Everybody Owns* (Holiday matinee, 2308-A Kettner Blvd., San Diego, CA 92101) Now this is refreshing. Waxwing takes elements of punk rock and forces it to grow up and address real issues. Vocalust/songwriter/leader Rocky Votolato is not only a compelling lyricist, but the words he sings resonate with depth and intensity while his mates, including younger brother Cody, churn out incredible grooves on tracks like "everything's On Fire," "G," "The Gift of Light" and "Schoolmaker." This is a remarkable record for the playing is sharp and intense, yet Waxwing still retain a sense of warmth throughout Nobody Can Take What Everybody Owns. This is a perfect example of what can happen when a band takes what it does seriously, for there is not a note out of place on this disc, and the sound includes raving flare ups and stripped down, raw enthusiasm. To his credit Votolato does not shy away from difficult topics, as the lyrics of "The Worst Kind of Liars" proves. I was very impressed here and I hope that Waxwing is given the raise these guys deserve. - Rich Quinlan

WEAPONS FOR PEACE - *Version 1.0* (www.weaponsforpeace.com) Hailing from the heartland of Pennsylvania, Weapons for Peace will excite those who love big guitar rock, but do not want to sacrifice warmth and melody. The four songs here are all potential radio darlings, as Rick Reardon fearlessly reveals his emotions on "You Said," "Tendencies of Me" and the powerful "Don't Ever." Each of these tracks balance harrowing lyrics with exceptional musicianship. Guitarists Jason Callais and Phil Williams are inseparably tight, creating a fluid sound that is commercially viable without sacrificing intensity. The rhythm section of drummer Jim Bedorf and Tony LaMonaca are monstrous, alternating tempo and time with ridiculous ease, allowing Reardon's voice to waft within the context of the playing, not fighting for attention. While all of the efforts should impress, I was most taken by "Paradise". Featuring a volumous riff and insatiably catchy chorus, "Paradise" is a track born for mass acceptance, for it takes primal rock energy and funnel it into three-plus minutes of luminous harmony. This is band worth watching for they have bottled a sound that is true to their musical routes but is also palatable enough for a wide array of people to enjoy. Meshing poetic writing, skillful, slick playing and bountiful volume, Weapons for Peace should be just beginning a promising career.-Rich Quinlan

BEN WEASEL - *Fidatevi* (Panic Button Records, 3284 Adeline Street, Berkeley, CA 94708) Holy shit, who is this guy and what has he done with the real Ben Weasel? *Fidatevi* is Ben Weasel's first solo album, outside the realms of Screaching Weasel/Riverdales, and it sure is a departure for him. The music is still pop-influenced punk rock, but more in a middle-era Social D vein than the Ramones-powered style he's most known for. The signature voice is still there, but the words coming from it are nothing like you've ever heard from this guy. The lyrics are not dropping with sarcasm or snotty remarks; instead they are very thoughtful, introspective examinations of self, relationships, and life. The biggest departure though – the one that really makes one think that Ben must have been kidnapped by aliens or replaced by the pod people - is "Strangers," a quiet number featuring acoustic guitar and piano accompanying Ben's impassioned vocals. Overall, this album is more mature, both musically and lyrically, than anything Ben's done before. It's not wimpy - it's still punk-fueled, fast and loud. It's not a compromised sell-out in order to make more money, it's still the real thing. It's just an unexpected surprise. And a good one at that! - Paul Silver

WHEN IN ROAM - *Shadow Traffic* (1050 Birdell Rd, Honeybrook, PA 19344) The sleeper CD in the stack! I know absolutely nothing about these guys, except that they're from the Philadelphia area and feature Nick form Violent Society on guitars and vocals. Powerful, original emotive sounds with an underlying angst that leaves you wanting to hear more. They may not have a record label as of yet, but I can't imagine this not being picked up by an indy. Make the effort and get it. – Tom Brebric

YAKUZA - *Way of the Dead* (Century Media Records) – Not since the disturbed insanity of Mr. Bungle's first album has a band impressed this much with a sheer sonic onslaught. Chicago's Yakuza have created a blasterpiece of chaotic noise, haunting guitar riffery, squealing saxophones and vocal shred, on only their second album, Way of the Dead. The band members cite everyone from Miles Davis to Neurosis as influences, and it shows. Songs leap and lurch between post-apocalypse mind melters and ambient jazz interludes (or, in the case of the 40-plus minute "01100011101," jazz opuses). For heavy music fans, Yakuza is the band Mr. Bungle should have been, electing to base their sound around extreme riff metal instead of wacked-out circus music for deranged freaks. Granted, Bruce Lamont doesn't have Mike Patton pipes, but few do. Lamont more than makes up for his slight lack of vocal range with some head-shaking saxophone skronk, including a duel to the death with Chicago jazz staple Ken Vandermark. – Jason Schreurs

THE YOUTH AHEAD - EP (Gig Records www.theyouthahead.com) Four new songs from one of the funest (yeah, funest) punk bands around! TYA know how to write a cool, rockin' tune ("Simple Guy"), or a passionate ballad ("Whole New View"). "Big Ed's BBQ" (about an all you can eat rib joint in Matawan, NJ). Is a hilarious sing a long tune that will surely get the band some free eats next time they go there. "Last Christmas is an upbeat, heartbreaker seasonal ditty, that rivals the Ramones "Merry Christmas (I Don't Wanna Fight Tonight"). The Youth Ahead recently were one of the headliners at this years Surf & Skate Fest in Asbury. Hopefully a full CD will be on it's way soon! – Phil Rainone

THE YOUTH AHEAD - *The Oneder Years* (Gig Records www.gigrecords.com) I first caught these guys at a local show about 2 years ago. They had been organizing shows there, and around the area. Good shows, and when I spoke to them, I found they put a lot of thought into the shows and their music. Next thing you know, they're playing with Catch 22 at Birch Hill, then Convention Hall in Asbury Park. Last year they played the Warped Tour when it landed in Asbury. This year, as one of the headliners for the Asbury Surf & Skate Fest, they're better and just as dedicated as when I first saw them. Their full CD (and the new EP) are like an extension of their live show. On songs like "One Hit Song," "Beautiful Day," & "FYM," they sing about teen crushes that feel like an explosion! "FYM" is cheerful party chant that will have you breaking out the cheese wiz. (Forget about the words, and just sing along with the catchy "Na-Na-Na-Na's). Their cool rockin' version of the Bangles "Walk Like an Egyptian" is a bonus track that breaks in about 1 min. after the last song, so wait for it. The Youth Ahead is going to be around for a long time to come! - Phil Rainone

XCANAANX – *Gehenna Made Flesh* (Ignition, 1 Chandos Road, Turnbridge Wells, Kent, TN1 2NY, England) – Who would have thought there were still straight edge bands out there? Sure enough, a strong scene trudges on in Europe and XCanaanX are leading the way with a bludgeoning mix of metal and hardcore. This is not to be confused with metalcore, although it's easy to see how tons of ex-straight edge bands have progressed into the 1000-mph tempo change-core that currently smothers the North American hardcore scene. XCanaanX don't get in above their heads; sure, they use metallic riffs and blast beats a lot, but the songs are simpler and easier to listen to than their evolved brother — the metalcore beast. Granted, it is annoying to open up the CD booklet and be blinded with all of those X's around the thank you list names. Otherwise, Gehenna Made Flesh is a six-song welcome treat that brings back fuzzy memories of trying to scrub Jiffy marker off my hands in the shower. – Jason Schreurs

YESTERDAY'S KIDS – *Can't Hear Nothin'* (Panic Button Records) This Wisconsin-based
more of its pop-punk influence to a band like The Get Up Kids than their lab
Screeching Weasel. While there are songs here with tempos falling into the punk
plethora of organs and calculated harmonies make them more of a power-pop act rea
weepy emo-ish numbers for the girlies. – Johnny Puke

Bouncing Souls, at City Gardens, 1991 Photo by Toni Lieggi

AO – *Parade of Chaos* (Solid State Records, PO Box 12698, Seattle, WA, 98111) – Their name rhymes with Wow!, and it's a good thing too. The latest record from Zao is an earsplitting horror show of inhuman vocals and smothering riffs. It's stripped-down thrash mayhem that is crushing skulls every step of the way; other than a few melodic breakdowns, these songs are pure headbang material. With Zao's future always shrouded in uncertainty, Parade of Chaos would be the perfect swan song for a band who refuse to jump the latest trends. If it's quitting time, they will be remembered for an album that sheds all of the bullshit and goes straight for the jugular. Parade of Chaos is also refreshingly void of the preachy crap we've come to expect from Christian bands. – Jason Schreurs

COMPILATIONS & SPLIT CD's

ATTICUS - Dragging The Lake (SideOneDummy, 6201 Sunset Blvd., Suite 211, Hollywood, CA 90028) Modern advances in cloning have enabled the makers of Atticus clothing to put together a compilation of bands that, by and large, sound exactly the same as one another. Aside from a decent American Nightmare track, the abrasive number "*am/pm*" off their full length, the vast majority of other bands appearing on this compilation seem to almost uniformly mimic either the tepid, languid SoCal Blink 182 approach, or a syrupy, slightly more intense New Found Glory one. One bout of pop-punk/indie/emo whining after another surfaces here, from the dulled Warped Tour-bound hooks of Finch, to the diluted melodic antics of A Simple Plan. The comparatively diversified, unflinchingly bland ska-punk of the Bosstones (ahh...still going strong after all these years), downright stale emo-pop of Alkaline Trio (sniff, sniff), and a disappointing number by Jimmy Eat World offer little variation on an uninteresting theme. For those who care, the song "Tiny Voices" from the Blink 182 side project entitled Boxcar Racer (featuring two of the three members of Blink plus an ex-member of SoCal 'core unit Over My Dead Body, incidentally) sounds exactly like....well, Blink 182, with the same irritating vocals and 3-chord progressions. In short, those who find this particular sub-genre of music appealing in mass quantities need look no further than this extensive compilation. Everyone else, steer clear. - Mike Ramek

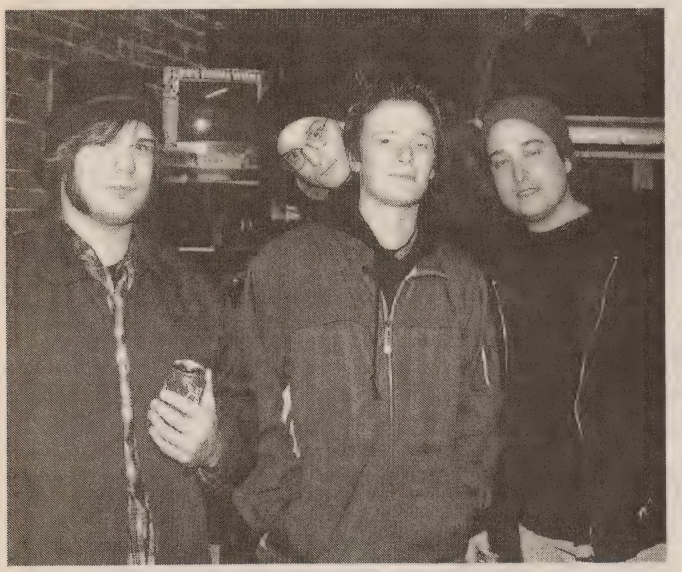
BILLY - Volume One (Hep Cat Records) DO NOT BUY THIS DISC!! If any of these Rock/Psychoabilly bands should invade your hometown, DO NOT attend their shows! These 21 songs of earthquakin,' hip-shakin,' floor-stompin' music will not have you thinking about the Pearly Gates and redemption, but of lust-filled, all-night parties and of the fire & brimstone that only Hell has to offer. Should your children receive this disc as a gift, DO NOT let them listen to The Rev. Horton Heat ("Loco Gringo's Like To Party"), Big Six ("Dixie Peach"), or Three Bad Jacks ("Hellbound Train"). All of these songs are full of empty promises that will have your kids gyrating in the rumpus room. As a concerned parent (don't even THINK about listening to this record yourself), you have to set the example and explain to your kids that just one listen to *Billy* will send you "Straight to Hell boy, straight to Hell." What's even worse is, they include women who sing of revenge (Marti Brom- "Eat My Words") and of sinfulness (Josie Kreuzer- "Lucky & Wild"). They could be someone's Mother, for land's sake! Listening to Big Sandy And His Fly-Rite Trio, Wayne Hancock, Nekromantix, or any of these barbaric, God forsaken bands will make you go blind (well, that's actually masturbation... but you get the picture). And don't get me started about those unrepentant Garage & Punk bands either, you know where that will lead! - Fireball Phil Rainone

BOUNCING SOULS / ANTI-FLAG Split CD (BYO) Two popular American acts here on this latest from the BYO Split Series, both of whom have profound UK punk influences. Anti-Flag have a Stiff Little Fingers-esque sound, and the Bouncing Souls even cover the Cock Sparrer's "We're Coming Back." Each band also covers a song from the other band – the Souls do "That's Youth" and Anti-Flag turn in "The Freaks, Nerds & Romantics." If you have to give one band the nod over the other, you'd have to give it to the Souls. Their ringing guitars and singalong choruses don't wear as thin as the rhetoric-filled rants of the affable half-wits in Anti-Flag. The Souls' "Punks In Vegas" has a special spot in my heart as well, since it was written about the annual Punk Rock Bowling tournament in Las Vegas where the band performed last year. The B-Souls' liner notes are by our humble editor, Jim Testa, I might add!! - Johnny Puke

THE EMO PHILIPS DIARIES: FROM TAMPA TO ETERNITY (New Granada Records, PO Box 291044, Tampa, Fl 33687-1044). While some of the bands on this compilation may not necessarily fit under the "emo" header, my expectations are simply not foiled here. And really, this should come as no surprise. Florida is the land of glowing neon and endless strip-malls, a deep sea of empty consumerism, a place where tourists simply come and go. Much like a stack of glossy postcards purchased at Disney Word, this record continually utilizes a disgustingly overproduced and slick aesthetic. Excessive and whiney vocals are the focal point of many tracks as the instrumentation is often too precise and clean sounding. I mean, these are tactics musicians such as Poison, Aerosmith and Bon Jovi use to sell records via corporate radio, right? You might encounter more danger shopping at the Dollar Store than listening to this record. Furthermore, boring and predictable lyrics with a complete lack of any political sensibility fits our era of ultra-conservatism. George Bush's daughters probably listen to this record in the White House. -David Gracon

EX MODELS/ THE SECONDS Split EP (My Pal God Records, 47 Hardy Dr., Princeton, NJ 08540) Opening with the 34 second "U Got What I Need," the Ex Models set a beautifully chaotic tone for this delicious, but all to brief EP. The second of the two Ex Models efforts, the equally aurally intense "3 Weeks," takes the fluidity of free form jazz and layers of unrelenting squall, screeching guitar noise that rips through your brain and ultimately becomes the most enjoyable agony of your life. I love this band, but I wish they were represented by either more or longer tracks here. The remaining duo of songs are delivered by The Seconds, a slightly more conservative act than their compatriots, but still a highly unpredictable band. "Mommy, Mommy, Mommy" has a trance like aura about it and after numerous listenings, I found myself becoming increasingly infatuated. However, on "Better Suit," the band sounds dangerously close to a conventional rock outfit, complete with a warm harmony and chorus. I am uncertain if his was a teaser for fans or an introduction for the uninitiated, but regardless of intention, this was pretty damn cool. - Rich Quinlan

FRONTSIDE / *TOMSAWYER Split CD (SinisterLabel, PO Box 1178, LaGranga Park, IL, 60526) – This is like a bad nightmare -- a split CD where both bands are really, really awful. Usually, at least one band on a split is worth a listen, but not here. Let's start with Frontside. Completely amateur sounding metalcore with some of the worst, trying-to-be-evil vocals ever put to tape. Aargh, stop it! The singing sounds like a rabid chipmunk. Alvin ate some rat poison and is freaking out while four dudes do their worst impression of The Swarm, but are so bad at playing their instruments they can't even replicate a decent Chokehold. This band needs to be exterminated, now! Okay, so *tomsawyer aren't nearly as bad, but they can start by losing that asterisk in their name and grasping the basic concept of capitalization. Next, they can turf the cheap Hot Water Music/ Jawbreaker imitation and work on some ideas of their own. Uh oh, some of these background vocals are starting to sound like Alvin. Could some of the Frontside chipmunks be doubling in this band?! Blah, this leaves a thoroughly sour taste in the mouth. – Jason Schreurs



American Degenerate

FAIRMOUNT / MULTI-PURPOSE SOLUTION / AMERICAN DEGENERATE SPLIT CD (Reinforcement Records) This sampler from NJ's Reinforcement Records gives you an album-length taste of three bands, providing a (long) EP's worth of material for each group. Fairmount starts things off with seven tracks worth of material that combines catchy pop-punk melodies with emo lyrics and vocal delivery, so you can bob your head and feel miserable at the same time. If you're into Dashboard Confessional and the like, and enjoy songs that wallow in adolescent angst, you could do a lot worse. At least Fairmount isn't all breakdowns and hardcore/metal cliche's, the songs actually bounce. I just find most of them whiney.... and song titles like "Pretending Greatness Is Awaiting" or "Coping With The Human Race," delivered without the slightest hint of irony, strike me as a little precious, if not pretentious. I didn't enjoy Multi-Purpose Solution's full-length at all; although I respected the band's willingness to experiment and break away from basic hardcore song structures, I couldn't handle those raw, growled vocals. The 5 songs here actually ameliorate the harshness of the vocals (this guy sounds more and more like Tom Waits to me) and the music is, once again, impressive in its adventurousness, from tinkling, spacey indie rock jams to raunchy, bluesy rock and roll. I especially enjoyed the pumping "One Or Two?" and the intricate, psychedelic guitars of "Everything Happens Twice." Finally, American Degenerate chimes in with five tracks of of their uptempo guitar punk. I guess you could call these guys "emo;" they certainly fit the profile: Overdrive guitars, biting lyrics delivered with emotional intensity, and most of the songs seem to be about girls (or more specifically, getting your heart broken by girls.) But the band's music suggests that they've been influenced as much by the Pixies, Green Day, and Nirvana as Dag Nasty and Sunny Day Real Estate. Driving, powerful, sincere, they've got a sound that cuts through labels and grabs your attention, as an introduction to their music alone, this CD is worth checking out. - Jim Testa

GREASY KIDS STUFF - Songs From Inside the Radio (Confidential Recordings, PO Box 791 Peter, Stuyvesant Station, New York, NY 10009) From the WFMU show of the same name comes this comp, featuring bands like The Go-Nuts, The Phantom Surfers, The Zambonis, The Mr.T Experience and many more offering up their "G" rated fare. Greasy Kids Stuff is a radio show where all the songs are geared to a younger crowd. It's kind of heart warming to hear songs about brushing your teeth, monkeys and pirate ships coming from punk rock bands who are supposed to be all cynical and surly. If feel good cuteness is your bag then snap this up and start your day off with a smile. - Oliver Lyons

HERO PATTERN / VAL EMMICH Split CD (Artist Amp/Childlike Records, 2 Draeger Pl. South River NJ 08882) This Split CD unites two of NJ's most promising young indie rock bands (who already share a bond through their participation with Artist Amplification, the Garden State's grassroots promotional organization.) The key to Hero Pattern's engaging, sometimes lilting alt-rock is its sincerity. There's an infectious earnestness to Jay Kundrath's vocals that you make you want to become as involved in these songs as he is. Although these recordings were made when the band had just barely come together (see our interview in this issue,) everything sounds tight and well arranged, with Mike Kundrath's more emphatic drumming especially evident. The problem with wholesome is that it's just this side of bland, which is not a good thing for a rock 'n' roll band. But based on recent live performances, the band looks to be finding its voice. For comments on Val Emmich's tracks, see the review of his full length CD in this issue. – Jim Testa

HOW WE ROCK (Burning Heart/Epitaph Records) Compilations usually take a long time to get through (about 20 songs), especially if the music sucks (insert your list of bands here). While I'm listening to *How We Rock*, I'm doing some other work also. I keep interrupting what I'm doing to check the song list. I'm up to the 13th band - Electric Frankenstein's "NY Nights" - and the music keeps grabbing my attention. The known bands like The Donnas ("40 Boys In 40 Nights") and Supersuckers ("Shake It Off"), sound fresh and vibrant. The newer bands like The Hellacopters, the red-hot, highly hyped Hives, and Sahara Hotnights take turns kicking this disc into high gear with tight , melodic songs. This is one of those comps that will inspire you to go out and buy the bands full album once you hear what they have to offer. *How We Rock* sells for just a few bucks. 19 great bands including Rocket From The Crypt, Dwarves, and my vote for one of the coolest band names, the Gotohells. - Phil Rainone

LOCATION IS EVERYTHING VOL.1 (Jade Tree Records, 2310 Kennwynn Rd. Wilmington DE 19810) This was a gift for me to write: Jade Tree has spent the better part of the last ten years as one of my favorite labels in the world. *Location Is Everything* focuses on the past two glorious years of the company, a time of increased growth and the construction of a stellar stable of acts. The 23 tracks here run the gamut, including country-twang (Promise Ring's "Easy"), the big guitar punch of Girls Against Boys, gentle beauty (Denali, Cub Country and Mighty Flashlights) and abrasive hardcore fury, embodied in the bands Strike Anywhere, Paint It Black and The Explosion. The diversity is impressive, but the fact that all of these bands are held together by a commonality of limitless talent is what makes this compilation all the more dazzling. There literally is something for every musical palate, yet the sequence of songs flows effortlessly from one to the next. Other memorable contributions are provided by Jonah Matranga' s OneLineDrawing and his new act, New End Original, Milemarker, Jets to Brazil (including a rare demo track) and Pedro the Lion. For those who have watched with rapt attention the development of Jade Tree, a release of this caliber should ome as no surprise. However, if you are a recent admirer of what Tim Owen has pieced together, you must find this immediately. One of the true indies still left untainted by external forces, this is a glorious testament to the genius of the label. - Rich Quinlan

LAST BREATH - The Emo Diaries Chapter Eight (Deep Elm Records, PO Box 36939, Charlotte, NC 28236, www.deepelm.com) Yet another chapter in the long running "Emo Diaries" series of compilations is out from Deep Elm Records. But why they keep using the word "emo" in the title, I'll never know. Maybe they're part of the vast MTV conspiracy to water down emo and call everything from alternative rock to pop punk with a few bars of heavy guitar, "emo." In any case, this series of comps has had very little in the way of emo-core on them, and this latest is no exception. KELLY8 opens this up with a bang, though -- well, musically at least. The vocals remind me too much of that annoying singer from Rush. LONG SINCE FORGOTTEN are next with what can only be called a power pop tune, and nothing could be further from emo. It's a jangly kind of track of the alt-pop variety, such as you might hear on your commercial alternative radio station. Song after song on this comp makes me think I'm listening to my local at-rock station, except there isn't 10 minutes of commericials every 5 minutes. Don't waste your time. - Paul Silver

LIVE FROM THE MASQUE (www.dionysusrecords.com) As close are your gonna get to being at an early LA punk show at the famed punk club The Masque. Eleven banbs including: The Weirdos, The Dickies, The Bags, The Germs, The Zeros, The Eyes, The Skulls, The Alleycats, The Randoms, and Black Randy (who pulled a David Johansen and now goes by El Vez). A super raw recording but this was the real deal punk and their wasn't a lot cash floating that could buy expensive recording equipment at the time so the recording just adds to the atmosphere and listen experience. If you were ever interested in checking out seminal LA punk rock before the term hardcore came into existence this *Live from The Masque* showcases the best it had to offer. –Rick K.

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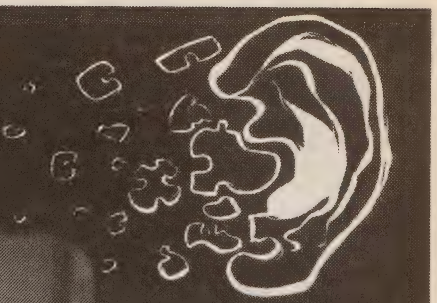

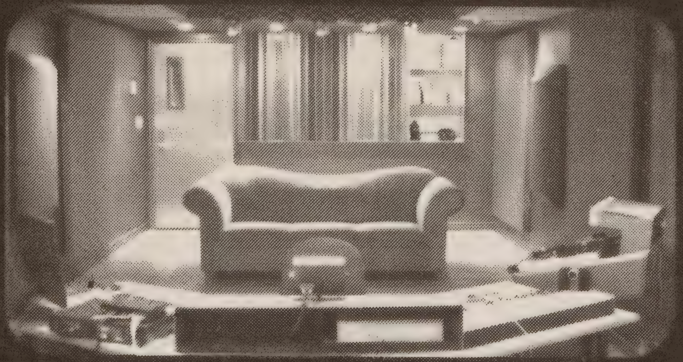

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PUNK ROCK IS YOUR FRIEND (Kung Fu Records, Box 38009, Hollywood CA 90038) With the exception of the Vandals, the Ataris, and No Use For A Name, it's all unknowns on this comp, some of whom are quite good, all of whom play with high quality production. I'd heard some of Israel's Useless ID before and liked it, and the two cuts here are no exception. I'd seen the name Ozma around too (they did this year's Warped Tour) but with such a fruity name, I imagined they were a Phish cover band. I was wrong, they're a Weezer cover band. The other notable newcomers are Audio Karate, Tsunami Bomb, Antifreeze, and M16. The CD is also enhanced (that means you can stick it in your computer for extra stuff, like a bunch of videos.) Excellent graphic design here by girlie clothing designer Paul Frank (who does those monkey-face t-shirts.) – Johnny Puke

ROCK N ROLL A' GO GO Vol. 6 (Devil Doll Records, Box 30727, Long Beach CA 90853) Although I've never heard any of the previous installations of this series, I will watch out for more in the future, as this CD was a great introduction to four bands on the bar-rock end of the punk spectrum. Two songs each from the four bands including Peepshows and 69 Charger. I especially enjoyed the tight guitars of Hellride and the AntiSeen-influenced destructo-rock of Muscle Car. – Johnny Puke

RAMONES FOREVER – An International Tribute (Radical Records, 77 Bleecker Street, New York NY 10012) Sure, there have been Ramones tribute discs before, and an upcoming major label release offers marquee names like Green Day, Rancid and the Red Hot Chili Peppers paying their respects to the Fab Four. It's unlikely, however, that those well-known bands will match the amateurish charm shown by the contributors to *Ramones Forever – An International Tribute*. Featuring mostly bands from Belgium, where this comp was originally released, the nearly two dozen performances provided *Ramones Forever* are truly priceless. From straight-forward, three-chord punk (Belgium's Golden Green and "I Wanna Live") to hip-hop influenced electronica (France's No Bluff Sound and their take on "Psycho Therapy"), there is a little of something for everyone on *Ramones Forever*. The USA is represented, appropriately enough, by the Marky Ramone Group, delivering a spirited take on "I Don't Wanna Grow Up," Ramones acolytes the Huntingtons on "Life's A Gas" and 5¢ Deposit with a scorching "We Want The Airwaves." Other countries represented include Greece (with Mika's weird dancefloor rendering of "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue"), Peru (Da Lama's "Beat On The Brat"), Germany and Hungary. No other Ramones tribute offers such a wide range of musical styles and talent and punk purists might recoil in horror at some of the "creative" renditions of Ramones classics. The Reverend would like to think that Joey – a music lover and rabid record collector -- would have enjoyed *Ramones Forever* in the same spirit in which it was delivered. (www.radicalrecords.com) -- Rev. Keith A. Gordon

RAMONES MANIACS (Trend Is Dead!/Reinforcement) Another Ramones compilation? Yup. This one recreates the bruddah's double-live LP *Ramones Mania,* mostly with bands you probably haven't heard of. Most of these tracks are demo quality, and fairly faithful recreations of the originals, if a little faster and noisier. My favorite track is Love Camp 7's "Sheena Is A Punk Rocker," which they slow down into a Rolling Stones-ish country blues. NJ's Blanks 77 rave up the Ramones' only political song, "Bonzo Goes To Bitbug," a timely reminder of presidential folly. Another standout tracks: NYC's Furious George on "Pinhead," The Frantics' "Bop Til You Drop," Cletus' pop-punk version of "Outsider," and Hammerbrain's "Animal Boy." Hey ho, let's go (again.) – Jim Testa

REINFORCEMENT RECORDS SPRING 2002 MUSIC SAMPLER (Reinforcementrecords.com) Reinforcement Records' sampler should come with a warning about the extreme level of fructose found within this disc; 12 bands and 23 efforts, most of it dominated by pure sugar coated pop-punk that will make the girls squeal and the uninformed guys happy as well. There is noting wrong with any of the bands on this disc, and quite a few of them are guilty pleasures. The *Kerplunk*-era Green Day stylings of the wonderfully titled John Stamos Project, along with Copperpot, Pennyroyals, Fairmont (who contributed one of the best of the bunch with "Rebuilding Home", a mature, emotional acoustic effort that truly stood out) and Blue Channel all provide quick, high tempo nuggets of guitar pop punk that is far from revolutionary, but if you like Screeching Weasel or are more recent devotees to the scene and cheer on New Found Glory, you'll love this. There are a few acts which did not stick to the predisposed formula, particularly The Multi-Purpose Solution. This band from Clifton, NJ was much more of a "throwback" sounding unit; dark, moody and highlighted with nearly gothic overtones, "Running Away From Melissa" and "Superman's Flying Guns are Shooting" highlighted the release for me. Heads Up Penny and American Degenerate also separated themselves from the pack and are two bands worth pursuing. Overall, the disc was easy on the ears, but overly recycled.-Rich Quinlan

SECRET WNEARVANA: San Francisco (TINNITUS Records, 250 Napoleon St. Suite K, San Francisco, CA 94124) Offering an alternative to that "punk tribute to Nirvana" nonsense that came out awhile back is Nearvana. Twenty-one San Francisco bands that you've never heard of offer up bizzare versions of songs you loved when you were eleven. I was never a Nirvana fan and I'm not sure many of these bands on this comp were either. I'm pretty sure that if the late Kurt Cobain ever heard The Reducer's techno version of "Polly", The Chantigs lounge pop restructuring of "Come As You Are" or Poontwang turning the chaotic "Sliver" into synth song, he'd shoot himself. Again. - Oliver Lyons

Minor Threat, 1980 (from "Twenty Years Of Dischord" box set; photo courtesy of Dischord Records)

KULVI / ZELIENOPLE - Split 7-inch EP (Loose Thread˜Records, PO Box 220180, Chicago, IL 60622) Tekulvi play quiet, ethereal and elegant music which feature remarkably understated vocals. There was an underlying sense of force lying peacefully just below the surface, seemingly ready to strike at any moment, accented by the noisy guitar work of Chris Almodovar and Phil Naumann. Like a giant awakening from a slumber, "Low Center of Gravity" takes a few moments to fully gather itself as its slowly works towards a rousing and all too brief crescendo. Interesting, but I want to hear more before formulating a solid opinion. Zelienople are even more atmospheric than their recording mates, but they are a very difficult band to record, for they usually dispose of previously formulated material and make each performance an improvisational mass of experimentation. Using reserved instrumentation which includes Brian Harding's clarin et playing, although he sounds as if he is working an oboe on "It's Hard o Steal Cars," both this song and "Christmas" are two expansive efforts that are simultaneously soothing and intriguing. Look for a full length from these guys very soon. - Rich Quinlan

TWENTY YEARS OF DISCHORD (3 CD set) (Dischord Records) A little over 20 years, a bunch of high school kids in Washington D.C. decided to start a band and put out their own records. Yada yada yada and now it's 2002, and Dischord Records represents the standard for the DIY ideal all over the world, the indie label by which all other indie labels are judged. This epic 3-CD collection shows just how 16 year olds can change the world three chords at a time, with 2 CD's that cull tracks from the entire, breathtaking Dischord catalog and a third disc with outtakes and rarities from bands like Minor Threat, Government Issue, Scream, Marginal Man, Dag Nasty, and Fugazi. That list of bands alone pretty much sums up the Dischord story – GREAT music from great bands, all home grown, all DIY, all recorded and released on a handshake. Arranged in chronological order, you can hear the D.C. sound grow from sweaty teenage slam-a-rama to experimental and challenging bands like Soulside, Shudder To Think, Jawbox, and Nation of Ulysses. You can trace the roots of emo from Minor Threat to Embrace to Rites of Spring, and catch up on all the amazing, short-lived Dischord bands who might've slipped by you, like Egg Hunt, Skewbald, Autoclave, and Smart Went Crazy. There's also a thick booklet with details about the recordings and an encyclopedia's worth of photos. If you care at all about punk rock and where it came from, then this is one box set you have to own. – Jim Testa

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY (Drive -Thru Records) First of all, this is the coolest CD box ever (it doesn't take much to amuse me). It's a CD jewelcase size pizza box (pizza not included, but there's a yummy photo of a peperoni pizza on the disc). Even better are the 11 bands (18 songs) that are included. Most of the songs are unreleased or rare, and they could all be hit-bound singles! Allister ("Somewhere Down The Line In Fullerton" & "Stuck"), Fenix Tx ("O'Bleek"), & Midtown ("Get It Together"), are pop/punk bands that were featured on last years Surf & Skate Fest in Asbury, and will be on this years Warped Tour. For those of you that are not familiar with some of these bands, this is the best place to start. It's also cool for anyone who knows the bands, and wants some extra tunes to hold them over until they see them live. - Phil Rainone

The WRENS/ The Five Mod Four – Split CD (No Karma, PO Box 71203, Milwaukee WI 53211) The first new Wrens material in years comes as a bit of a disappointment; there are only three Wrens songs on this split EP and two of them are oldies culled from the leftover bin. But "Bus Dance" – which dates back to 1991, according to the Wrens' website - is a good reminder of the measured insanity that made these guys legendary, and the word is that a new full-length is on the way. Alas, the one new song here, "The 45'er," isn't much to get excited about. The Five Mod Four is solo project of the guy who owns this label (and volunteers as the Wrens' webmaster), and all I can say is that putting his own band on this split with The Wrens took a lot of gall, since his tracks are just mediocre indie-rock with flat vocals. -- Jim Testa

DVD

CARL PERKINS AND FRIENDS - *Blue Suede Shoes, a Rockabilly Session* (Snapper Music, www.snappermusic.com) This is a slick, professional production for the Cinemax cable TV channel from back in 1985. It's a one-hour performance by the aged (now late) rockabilly "legend," Carl Perkins. Along for the ride are his "friends," such rockabilly luminaries as George Harrison, Ring Starr, Eric Clapton, Dave Edmunds, and Rosanne Cash. The result is far from the raucous, grease-powered, youthful energy of the real deal, and is ultimately a souless, self-indulgent, bigtime concert. Hey, I though rockabilly musicians were supposed to be young, rebellious hoodlum types with greasy hair and tatoos. So why are all these performers rich old guys with pot bellies, blow-dried hair, and fancy sport coats? Give me a break. And there's no speacial features, just the performance and a song index to jump to a particular song. - Paul Silver

JOHNNY THUNDERS - *In Cold Blood* (Music Video Distributors, PO Box 980, Oaks, PA 19456, www.musicvideodistributors.com/punk/) This DVD presents a live set recorded in New York City on March 13, 1982. This is a great live recording, with good sound quality (better than most live recordings) and decent camera work. The music is pure, raw early punk. The era is brought back to life with songs such as the raunchy, "Too Much Junkie Business," a sloppy version of the surf classic, "Pipeline" (from Johnny Thunders?!?), the depressive stylings of "Sad Vacation," and the classic "Born to Lose." Overall, a great, if too short (the DVD clocks in at about 30 minutes) document of the real thing. No special features other than a song index, which allows you to jump to a particular song. - Paul Silver

HANG THE VJ (Burning Heart Records, Box 441, 701 48 Orebro, Sweden) There's over three hours of punk rock music videos on this DVD, ranging from hardcore to pop-punk and everything inbetween. Here's a rundown: 59 TIMES THE PAIN offer up three old-school hardcore tracks that are OK. BODYJAR's first of three, "You've Taken Everything," is a clever video for a modern pop-punk tune. BOMBSHELL ROCKS offers a cool old-old-school punk track with a twist -- piano! BREACH provide four videos with very artsy images and quasi-industrial metallic songs. THE BUSINESSm put in an appearance for a track that's an update of the classic Brit-punk working class sound. CHICKENPOX expertly blend mod, ska, & pop styles on their two tracks, which yields a sound almost akin to Dexy's Midnight Runners at their best. The two videos from DO NOTS are nothing more than moden-day, watered down pop-punk that would be very much at home on MTV or your local commercial "alternative" radio station. I could almost swear I've heard THEHIVES or a band that sounds just like them on commercial "alternative" radio. THE HIVES are different, though. Their blending of influences such as The Make-Up and the Buzzcocks is pretty good, and their videos are well-down. Actually, the commercial band who they remind me of is White Stripes, a pretty cool two-piece that's seem an unexpected and unexplained burst of fame. One of the highlights of hte DVD has to be the two excellent videos from the always subversive INTERNATIONAL NOISE CONSPIRACY. LIBERATOR's five videos are mostly forgettable attempts to cash in on the ska revival, though "Everybody Wants It All" is a fairly clever spoof of infomercials, and "Handyman" is a pretty funny video with decent music. LOOPTROOP's "Long Arm of the Law" is a laughable Euro-rap track with a bunch of white guys trying to sound like African Americans and acting all oppressed. MILLENCOLIN represents a low-point of the DVD, with dix lame videos of weak, alternative pop-punk. MINDJIVE's sole contribution is even wrse than LOOPTROOP, more white-guy rap with Shaft-esque funk tossed in. MONSTER provide four decent rock-steady-like tracks with inderstated vocals and some cool dancing. NINE offers up an eerie neo-gothic metal track, "Time Has Come." NON FUN AT ALL is an apt name for a band whose six videos are more lame alternative rock and pop-punk, in a poor Bad Religion imitation. The PEEPSHOWS "Surrender My Love" is a decently raw rocking cut with a minimalist "live performance" video element. PROMOE is another white guy trying to rap black about the media on "Prime Time." The weird twist on that one is the samples of Jello Biafra spoken word gigs used to try to give it cred. RAISED FIST offers a poor excuse for a hardcore video that's as hard to listen to as it is to watch. RANDY, on the other hand, brings some great, bouncy power-pop into the fray. Near the end of the DVD comes a real treat -- four videos from REFUSED. The first is the great "New Noise." REFUSED's music is a unique blend of hardcore, emo, nd math that yields music which is pure, intense, and exciting. SAMIAM's four videos show why one of the first bands to blend pop and emo were also one of the most successful; their sound is an edgier alternative rock sound. The final vide of the DVD, VOICE OF A GENERATION's "Billy Boy," is a Sex Pistols-esque classic late 70s punk homage. Overall, this disc is mostly a waste of aluminum. Yet it does have at least a few decent 1s and 0s on it. - Paul Silver

WEAPONS OF KUNG FU (Kung Fu Records) Besides 18 videos from some of your favorite bands (The Ataris, No Use For A Name, The Vandals, etc.), they also include TV commercials, trailers & previews. This 55 min. plus DVD has the cool feel of a 50's B-movie (like some of Ed Wood's horror/hot rod flicks)! The videos give the fans a better image of the bands, and a taste of their stage presence. (Most of these bands will be featured on this years Warped Tour). One of the stand out videos is The Vandals "My Girlfriends Dead." I don't want to give away the plot but, let's just say it's not what you'd expect. A cool companion to the latest Kung Fu Cd sampler. - Phil Rainone

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WHAT THE PUNK?! - An MVD Sampler (MVD, PO Box 280, Oaks, PA 19456) A rather choppy and hastily put together sampler DVD from MVD Video showcasing clips from all their punk-related titles. While many of their punk DVD's sound quite choice, the clips do little to any justice representing them. We're promised The Cramps but are treated to a :30 second clip of Luxx being beaten up from a movie called "The Foreigner." What I thought would be a live performance of TSOL's "Property is Theft" turns out only to be background fodder for a trailer to another DVD. Even The Offspring are represented by just having one of their songs played over a three minute snowboarding movie?!? But to my surprise there were some actual clips of bands playing music such as Bad Religion performing, "The Voice of God is Government" from their critically hailed DVD *The Riot*, a worse-for-wear Johnny Thunders doing his trademark "Born to Lose", and a late in the day Christian Death rocking through, "Dream For Mother." Overall I'd get MVD's catalog and order some actual DVD's because any disc that claims to have a rare GG Allin performance and then censors 3/4ths of it so it can be "played at your local store" is a waste of money that could be well spent buying booze. -- Oliver Lyons

BOOKS

BLOODCLOTS IN THE MAINSTREAM- Selected Tour Journals From The Snake-Pit of Punk Rock Retail, by Rob Santello (Chunksaah, P.O. Box 974, New Brunswick N.J. 08903 USA) Ever go to a big punk show and see the guys who travel with the band who sell their t-shirts and CD's? Ever wonder what that job is really like? Rob Santello worked for years as the merch guy for the Bouncing Souls, one of the hardest touring bands in punk, and through it all, he kept diaries of his thoughts and observations. We were lucky enough to run some of Rob's tour diaries here in Jersey Beat; this book is his second collection of those journals. Rob certainly doesn't write like a punk; he has a literary style that twists English into flowery curlicues, and he has a hell of way with aphorisms ("the Warped Tour is about a punk rock as a mustache;" "uncontrolled substances spawn uncontrolled laughter at 3 in the morning.") He also doesn't provide a lot of exposition or background, so if you're not a huge fan of the Bouncing Souls, names like Kate Hiltz or Lamar Vannoy probably won't mean much to you. But they don't really have to; these gonzo tales of life on the road – replete with rampant recreational drug use, alcoholic binges, and no-holds-barred descriptions of the fans, bands, club owners, and other vermin that Santello meets on his journeys – more than stand on their own. So if you ever wondered what the food is like backstage at the Warped Tour, or what bands do to amuse themselves during those long hours on the road, or whether all that sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll mythology is real or invented, I recommend you pick this up. You'll not only learn more about the punk rock lifestyle than you ever wanted to know, but you'll have fun turning the pages. – Jim Testa (www.chunksaah.com)

PUNK IS A FOUR LETTER WORD by Ben Weasel (Hope And Non Things) Does anyone read *Maximumrocknroll* anymore? And more to the point, does anybody care? If you came of age in the late Eighties or early Nineties and considered yourself a punk, you probably gobbled up every issue of MRR and cared *intensely* about what it had to say. And, like me, probably the first thing you turned to was Ben Weasel's column. When he wasn't taunting frat jocks and ridiculing straight-edgers from the stage as the singer of Screeching Weasel, Ben was usually saying something equally outrageous in his column, delighting thousands of readers and pissing off the ultra-PC powers-that-be at MRR's Berkeley HQ. If you're too young to remember any of that – or if you simply want to relive some of those memories – PUNK IS A FOUR LETTER WORD reprints some of Ben's classic MRR columns, as well as writing he did for other zines (but not, alas the TV columns he wrote for *Jersey Beat*.) The columns selected for this book concentrate less as Ben the punk agitator and more on Ben the writer; several of the best pieces are humorous recollections of various dead-end blue-collar jobs that Ben endured as a teen and young adult. Several columns do focus on the punk politics of the early and mid-Nineties, when major labels started gobbling up punk bands like Green Day and Jawbreaker. And then there's "The Rock Star And The Nanny," Ben's brilliant account of his backstage meeting with Nirvana perceptive as anything I've ever read about Kurt Cobain (as well as an eye-opening look at what goes on behind the scenes at a big rock concert.) PUNK IS A FOUR LETTER WORD is everything you'd expect from Ben Weasel – funny, outspoken, articulate, perceptive, occasionally outrageous, and always entertaining. – Jim Testa (www.hopeandnonthings.com)

VIDEO

BETWEEN RESISTANCE AND COMMUNITY-The Long Island DIY Punk Scene (Traffic Violation Records PO BOX 772 East Setauket, NY 11733) This well edited collection of footage spans interviews, live performances, and interactions between a small group of hardcore punk bands in the midst of the idyllic Long Island suburban landscape (stressing the DIY moniker as a means to distance themselves, to a degree, from the rest of the metal/emo/hardcore scene prevalent in that locale). The fairly verbose, often articulate group of kids that comprise the bands and activists herein serve to paint a portrait of a bland suburban environment rife with consumerism and apathy in which they dwell. It is this homogeneous landscape that they are desperately trying to counter, in some small way, with the proliferation of DIY shows in a variety of locales, including an array of basements, VFW halls, and record stores. Of the bands documented, most are decent, and a few (the walloping, deep seated Inquisition/Avail-esque Latterman, and the chaotic Sometimes Walking, Sometimes Running) are quite good. The live footage, much of it proficient in capturing the immediacy and intimacy of the sweltering basement and VFW shows, and the sporadic tour footage (focusing largely on Latterman and the both revered and maligned On The Might Of Princes), are undoubtedly the highlights of this film.

Not nearly as entertaining or vital, however, are a few somewhat self indulgent, self important tirades against vague notions of "consumerism", "commercialism", and the perceived accomplishments of the DIY communit/y. While there is much to be said for the appreciation of creativity inherent in this scene, diatribes criticizing the proliferation of strip malls, while highlighting the existence of late night parking lot kickball games on business property as a viable statement of unity and insurgence seems almost absurdly naïve. The equally vague references to "community" and "defiance" at certain intervals reek of a slight elitism, as well, in several instances recalling the most long-winded, vociferous rantings of a few individuals featured on the seminal film "Another State Of Mind", which was far more balanced in scope and viewpoint than this documentary is. While many who voice their opinions in this film are obviously quite intelligent, there is an overt predilection towards rhetoric spouting at times.

Ultimately, it is the faintest whiff of commercial success that triggers and propels the central conflict of the film. The frenetic chaos/melody hybrid On The Might Of Princes, once a champion of the Long Island DIY scene, is offered a recording contract with Revelation Records, and they accept this offer with obvious reservations.

A deluge of fairly predictable reproaches from fellow scenesters bemoaning such a profit-driven move commences. Cries of "betrayal" ultimately surface from a variety of offended parties, and while such feelings are somewhat understandable, given the nature of the scene which initially nurtured the band, the reaction seems a bit extreme considering the relatively minor nature of both the contract and label in question. While the band's ongoing rebuttals prove fairly insightful and genuine, the conflict of interests enacted by their decision ultimately remains unresolved, and they are never truly able to thoroughly justify their decision to the satisfaction of their peers.

Regardless of one's preconceived notions concerning the staunchly opinionated viewpoints and mindsets documented, this film, in its forty four minute duration, retains a fairly engaging narrative throughout, and is certainly worth viewing. If nothing else, this is an interesting testament to the existence of a small but thriving and active network of creative

EMISSION: Automatic Magnetic Lo (www.bifocalmedia.com) I've seen many attempts at doing a "video fanzine" - in fact, we did one ourselves at Jersey Beat back in the early Nineties - and I've never been impressed with the results. "Emission" impressed me. The video includes interview footage - real interviews, with musicians being asked serious questions and giving thoughtful answers - alongside excellent live footage. Bands on this issue include Superchunk, Milemarket, Party of Helicopters, The Faint, and others. It's well-produced, professionally edited, and well worth checking out. I'm hoping they keep putting these out too. - Jim Testa

SPARTA **Photo by Shawn Scallen**

ALL FANZINE REVIEWS BY JIM TESTA. Do you like zines? Jersey Beat is looking for someone to review them for us. Contact jim@jerseybeat.com.

AFTER FX #0 (James Harvey, 371 Crossfield Rd. King of Prussia PA 19406, $2) From the former editor of Keeping In Touch, this new zine is mostly reviews. There's an essay on overcoming writer's block, a report on the coffeehouse that the editors host, and a column extolling religion as the best way to confront the coming apocalypse.

ALARM #12 (Chris Force, PO Box 200069, Boston MA 02120 $3) Just when you think, God, this zine is looking so slick (inside color pages!) , there's a goofy photo of the editor posing with his knees in his shoes like a midget on the masthead. Punk rock, dude. Interviews with Bluetip, American Steel, Jurassic 5, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, and Saves The Day, among others, a political piece on Che Guevara, reviews, and nice layouts that don't overwhelm the text.

BARRACUDA #13 (Jeff Fox, PO Box 291873, Los Angeles CA 90029 $5) Cars! Cigars! Chicks with big knockers! With tongue firmly in cheek, Barracuda continues its testosterone-fueled look at things "real men" like (assuming you're a Playboy-reading Cro Magnon from the 1950's). #13 includes a look back at Duke Kahanamoku, the father of modern surfing, and How To Find A Good Mechanic, for all you guys with cars. #14 includes "the simple joys of owning a big smelly truck," more cheesecake pinups, and a remembrance of baseball great Curt Flood. Always good for a laugh or three.

THE BIG TAKEOVER #50 ($5, 249 Eldridge St. #14, NYC 10002) Social Distortion's ugly mugs stare at you from the cover, then inside there's the usual encyclopedic coverage. I don't think there's another zine around that covers so much territory per issue or does it so well – Mission of Burma, Breeders, Spiritualized, Ash, Bob Mould, Part 2 of editor Jack Rabid's feature on The Damned… I'm just getting started…. Mike Watt, The Church, Michael Azerrad on his "Our Band Could Be Your Life" book, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, Youth Brigade/BYO Records, The Shins, The Sights, and oh, about another two dozen interviews, plus a live reviews section unmatched by anybody, plus about a kazillion reviews. And with all that, my favorite part of The Big Takeover is still the editorials in the front of the mag, which this issue take several different looks at the perilous state of the recording industry. Need I add this is one of my all-time favorite zines.

BIGGER ISN'T BETTER (c/o READ Magazine, PO Box 3437, Astoria NY 11103 $2) This half-size zine (8 ½ x 11" folded in half, which is a format you don't see much anymore – hence the clever title) starts with "A New Yorker's Perspective On Los Angeles," in which the graduate student editor reflects on her time in L.A. There are personal diary-type essays like this sprinkled throughout the zine (like one on using mass transit in L.A.), interspersed with interviews The Muffs, Vandals, Bouncing Souls, and Mr. T Experience.) I really liked this zine; for instance, asking Dr. Frank of Mr. T Experience "what makes a really good love song?" Great question. Well worth checking out.

BURNT #4 (400 Park Rd. Parsippany NJ 07054, $1 or 3 stamps) How about an essay called "Why I Never Fall Asleep In Sociology?" Or an interview with Jordan from the excellent webzine Pastepunk.com? Or a look at police surveillance into private homes. Then there are lots of reviews in tiny type, all photocopied and pasted-together old-school style.

CARBON 14 #21 (PO Box 29247, Philadelphia PA 19125 $6) Slick, well done, and eclectic zine that includes a 7-inch EP (Candy Snatchers, Adam West, Twin Six, and Stevie & The Secrets). Features include Motorhead, AntiSeen, Nikki Sudden, artist Winston Smith, pro wrestlers, porn stars, tattooed ladies, and lots more. Always lots to read and check out here.

COOL BEANS #14 (Matt Kelly, 3181 Mission St. #113, San Francisco CA 94110, $6) This is the drugs, alcohol, and sobriety issue, although that doesn't seem to mean much. Mostly this is an intriguing mix of the famous and totally obscure. The writing just gets better and better in Cool Beans too. This issue includes Sonic Youth's Lee Ranaldo interviewing William Burroughs, and features on Fluff Grrl, Tumult Records, Hood, Loners With Boners, and some engrossing columns.

CRAZED SPARROW #3 (bonemarimba@hotmail.com, $1) Simplistic political rants ("the U.S. asked for 9/11") and cut-and-paste poetry. I found this difficult to read and ultimately not worth the trouble.

DAGGER #29 (Tim Hinely, PO Box 2464, Santa Rosa CA 95405 $2) I'm always impressed by those big glossy full-color fanzines that look like they were designed by PhD's from the Rhode Island School of Design, but there's still a place in my heart for the old-school newsprint punkzine, and Dagger is one of the best. You'll find more than punk and hardcore here though: Pernice Brothers, Beulah Stew, Velvet Crush are just a few of the features. This issue is from Fall, 2001 so I'm probably behind an issue or two, but by all means, if you're a fanzine junkie, add Dagger to your subscription list.

DESTROY ALL SKRATCH #74 (PMB 123, 17300 17th St. Suite J, Tustin CA 92780 $2) This fanzine as a publisher and gets some very impressive advertising, but scratch beneath the surface and it's a pretty standard punkzine: Bad Religion (they take to bassist Jay), Fugazi (they talk to Guy), Sensefield, Shiner, and a bunch of bands I've never heard of (Rudiger, Smut Peddlers, The Deal, 7000 Dying Rats.) Smudgy newsprint layouts, photos, lots of reviews. But damn they get a lot of ads!

DISORDER #1 (drmanhattan@msn.com) A comic book from Jersey Beat contributor Oliver Lyons and pals, about a kid in a dorm. And much like in *Seinfeld,* nothing really happens, which makes it a pretty accurate reflection of college life today.

EXTREME CONFORMITY #5 (Larry Nocella, PO Box 122, Royersford PA 19468 $3) 11" tall by 4" across, this brochure-sized zine is a series of dialogues between characters identified by little icons. It's even harder to read than it is to describe but you might have fun with it. From the editor of QECE zine.

FAT CITY #4 (Jay Hale, PO Box 120196, Boston MA 02122, $4.50) Nice looking new zine on slick magazine paper. Joey Ramone's on the cover and there's what purports to be Dee Dee's last interview inside, along with remembrances of the Ramones by the likes of Henry Rollins, Lars Frederiksen, and Ben Weasel. Also pro wrestler Hacksaw Jim Duggan, Dillinger Four, and a look at the Dead Kennedys' legal squabbles. There's a real reverence for Punk here that impressed me.

the get up kids
INFEST
MIKE RAMEK
fanzines

GO METRIC #14 (2780 Ryewood Ave. #F, Copley OH 44321 $2) Do you like Godzilla movies? The editor attended the Asian Fantasy Film Expo last year and writes all about it. There's also an essay intriguingly entitled "Why I Wanted To Move To Canada Before Sept. 11" Also: Making a video with the Young Fresh Fellows, interviews with The Dorks, The Decibels, and Big Dipper. It's all very flip with simple, grainy layouts and small type on white paper that's a big rough on the eyes. But there's a lot to read and some of it is offbeat enough to hold your interest despite the lack of eye-catching graphics and layouts.

THE GREAT BRAIN REBELLION (PO Box 122, Royersford PA 19468 $2) A weird little stick-figure comic book in which characters invade the "NTV" video awards and discover all the performers are lip synching… among other adventures.

HANGING LIKE A HEX #16 (Ryan Canavan, 201 Maple Lane, No. Syracuse NY 13212 $3) Cool color cover on this issue which includes features on Les Savy Fav, Rocket From The Crypt, Rival Schools, and Chuck D, and an interesting editorial piece on the state of fanzines which raises some good questions (but doesn't answer many of them.)

JACK #1 (PO Box 781, Boston MA 02130, $1) Here's an interesting idea for a zine: An unnamed journalist is using this as a way to whistle-blow on some of the corporate shit he sees go down on his day job. For instance, there's a look at the way that Internet domain name disputes are settled (70% in favor of big corporations over the little guy), or how the government is trying to circumvent free speech by limiting the ability to link to certain sites. Definitely an interesting read, especially if you're into the whole no-logos anti-corporate ideology.

JADED IN CHICAGO #13 (Bill Denker, 4031 Forest Ave., Western Springs IL 60558 $2) A quality zine that actually reminds me a little of JerseyBeat in its interviews, style, and commitment to unsigned bands. If you hate zines with zillions of reviews, you'll like Jaded In Chicago too; they only give two pages to their reviews section. Saves The Day, Rise Against, Haymarket Riot, the Fairlanes, and Plain White T's are the featured stories this time around.

JUICEBOXX #3 (Sarah Haldeman, 1810 Pennington Rd. Ewing NJ 08618, $1) Lots of high-school poetry, a short interview with a local band called Dawson River Kids (no photos), and three CD reviews: Blink 182, Green Day (misspelled Greenday), and Bigwig. Kids, what the matter with kids today?

LAW OF INERTIA #10 (Ross Siegel, 61 E. 8th St. PMB 125, NYC 10003, $5) Like so many zines we're reviewing this issue, this one starts out with the editor's personal reflections on Sept. 11. And then there are the reviews, dozens of them: (International) Noise Conspiracy, Rocking Horse Winner, Rocket From The Crypt, Henry Rollins, The Explosion, Rival Schools, Built To Spill, Tenacious D a little something for everybody, all sumptiously illustrated with excellent photos and modern layouts. Recommended.

LEFT OF THE DIAL #2 (David Ensminger, 1438 W. Alabama #4, Houston TX 77006 $4) A fanzine named after a Replacements song. Cool! (Anybody remember Run It?) The editor starts out with a personal statement about Sept. 11, then lots of punk interviews: Circle Jerks, Electric Frankenstein, The Fait, J Robbins, Mike Watt and lots, lots more. Good layouts and photos too. Well worth checking out.

LIFE & OTHER LOST CAUSES #1 (Lex Hart, 705 N. Lorraine Circle, Wilmington NC 28412 $2) The opening editorial looks at the city's crackdown against the music scene in the Wilmington (also home of the beloved W.E. Fest, so this is a topic of some importance to me.) Most of the rest of this debut issue is reprints of political articles on women's rights, prejudice, the West Memphis Three, and the question of drug use tied to techno music and raves.

LOLLIPOP #57 (PO Box 442493, Boston MA 02144 $5) Lollipop has pretty much crossed the line that separates fanzines from commercial fanzines – it's glossy, full cover, thicker than Spin, and covers mainstream entertainment (like the cover story on Drew Carey sidekick Ryan Stiles.) But Lollipop still has one ear to the underground; its expanded reviews format provides a little more depth than most 1-inch fanzine reviews, and bands covered in this issue include Fugazi (with Joe Lally), party animal Andrew WK, Dimmu Borgir, Fu Manchu, and Scissorfight. There's also a CD with 69 MP3's from a small army of indie, punk, and hardcore bands, a sizable fiction section, and reviews of video games, DVDs in addition to the wealth of CD reviews.

MUDDLE #19 (PO Box 189, Northport NY 11768 $3) Back on track after a bumpy hiatus, the new Muddle is a fat and informative and slick as a music-oriented version of Details. Mission of Burma, Charlatans UK, Rufus Wainwright… this is a punk zine? Well, there are also stories on Christiansen, Beulah, Superdrag, and The Shins, a look inside San Diego's Casbah rock club, and lots of reviews. Lots of big photos for the text takes pre-eminence over the layouts.

THE NEW SCHEME #5/ 6 (Stuart, PO Box 19873, Boulder CO 80308, $2) A good punkzine with a sense of humor. In issue #5, they launch their "We Hate River City High" campaign, interview Engine Down, Dismemberment Plan, Flashing Astonishers, and Pinq, and threw in a few provocative opinion columns and lots of reviews and cool photos. #6 has The Lawrence Arms, Casket Lottery, and Punk Planet writer/ author Joel Schalit.

PICK YOUR POISON #1/ #2 (Nate Gangelhoff, PO Box 8995, Minneapolis MN 55408 $1) A whole zine of stories about growing up. Specifically, going through early adolescence as a fucked-up punk kid. These stories remind me of some of Ben Weasel's old columns about the crappy jobs and stupid friends he had as a teenager. Pretty cool.

QECE #14 (Larry Nocella, PO Box 122, Royersford PA 19468, $1) The last issue, maybe. Mostly reflections, personal and political, on Sept. 11. As always, QECE offers up some good thought, well-written, simply displayed.

QUICK DUMMIES #14 (Robb Roemershauser, 6810 Belllaire Dr. New Orleans LA 70124, $2) This starts out with a long, rambling, nearly incoherent rant from the editor who talks about being sued for millions of dollars by some shadowy corporation and having his life turned upside down for several years. Then it morphs into a stream-of-consciousness diary about going to shows and hanging out in the punk scene. That's followed by some MRR-like columns (on arcane topics like deforestation), then interviews with bands like Strike Anywhere and Toys That Kill. The CD comes with a 31-song label-sampler CD that includes bands from Nola Records, Reinforcement, GMM, Slap A Ham, Coldfront and other labels.

READ #21 (Adam Liebling, PO Box 3437, Astoria NY 11103 $4) A nice mix of cheeky music interviews and the kind of quirky essays that might feel at home in a hip version of The New Yorkers. The music interviews are just loaded with attitude: Electric Frankenstein (Sal expounds on his Rock Conspiracy Theory,) Warrant (they really take the piss out of their hair-metal assholes), Midtown (the writer grills Gabe on his sex life), and so on. The essays are even better: There's one that tries to parody The Onion (in effect, parodying a parody) and "50 Punk & Ska Pick-Up Lines" ("I love you from A To Zine.") This is a terrific read from start to finish; I can't believe this is issue #21 and I've only just discovered this one!

THE RIGHT PATH #13 (Josh Lyons, 244 Rutgers, Rochester NY 14607, $2) You'd think from the title that this might be a dogma-driven zine devoted to Christian punk or straightedge or something, but if Josh and his staff has an agenda, it's not apparent from the interviews, which ask good, interesting questions (like asking the guy from Reach The Sky about the rumos that his band gets into a lot of fist fights in bars.) Feature stories also include American Nightmare, Building on Fire, the usual reviews section, and lots of good live photos of your favorite tattooed hardcore boys screaming into microphones or swinging guitars.

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TEAR IT UP
UNSEEN

SKYSCRAPER

SKYSCRAPER # 10/11 (PO Box 4432, Boulder CO 80306 $5) Brothers Peter and Andrew Bottomley continue to present one of the premier zines in America – thick, eclectic, nicely designed, and full of good writing. Issue #10 features this issue include Iggy Pop, the bands Edie Sedgwick, Arab On Radar, Le Tigre, Tindersticks, and Fat Day, and feature reviews of the Strokes and Blur, among others. #11 has Liars, GWAR, Clinic, Spiritualized, Mercury Rev, Half Japanese, a really long interview with NYC's Radio 4, and they even managed to interview Yoko Ono, whom they hail as one of the most misunderstood artists in rock. Recommended.

SUBURBAN VOICE #45 (PO Box 2746, Lynn MA 01903 $5) Still fighting the good fight in grainy black and white, Al Quint's quarterly look at the latest in hardcore and hard punk has reached the 20 year mark. This issue includes Brian from Grand Theft Audio Records, Crispus Attucks, Last In Line, Unseen, and Tear It Up, tons of reviews and great photos, and a 22-track CD with lots of cool mosh metal hc. One of my top 5 favorite zines, especially if you're into old-school punk and hardcore.

TIGHT PANTS #9 (918 17th St. East #1, Minneapolis MN 55404 $2) Here's the first zine I've seen with a humorous take on 9/11, with an editorial claiming that it was the evil powers behind Emo struck the Twin Towers. It's actually funny and the rest of the perzine's various rants and raves continue in much the same matter, taking on topics like "the militant grammarians of Massachusetts" and stories about bad jobs and insane co-workers. There are some record reviews in there too, but it's Madeline's rants that make this worth reading.

TORPEDO #1 (Gregg Yeti, PO Box 35070, Syracuse NY 13235 $3) Interviews with Longwave, Prosolar Mechanics (a tad dated at this point!), Libertine, Visionstain, Ashley Cox, some offbeat feature stories (like how to be a bellboy, or what to do when stopped by the cops). Irreverent and promising.

TOXIC FLYER #32 (Billy Whitfield, PO Box 39158, Baltimore MD 21212, $2) Still doing the old-school B&W newsprint punkzine thing. No Quark design classes for these punks. You can always find a few cool new bands to check out in Toxic Flyer – this time, the Start, Vision of Disorder, Sammy Se[illegible]ous, Funny Monkey, Rebel Rebel, and Rick Rose Rude (love the feather boa, dude.)

WONKA VISION # 18 (Justin Luczejko, PO Box 63642, Philadelphia PA 19147 $3) Lots of good interviews in this issue, including Todd Morse of H20, Andy Low, Ultimate Fakebook, one of the goons from Wolfpac on his band's extreme gross-out style of rock, Brand New, The Forgotten, and lots lots more. Really coming along, looking better every issue.

ZINE GUIDE #5 (PO Box 5467, Evanston IL 60204 $6) With the demise of Factsheet 5, which used to fulfill this role, Zine Guide is the best resource around for navigating through the world of zines. Unlike FF5, Zine Guide doesn't review fanzines, it just lists them and their contents, but it's still an invaluable resource, made even better by regular polls and interviews

Jersey Beat Back Issues

#51 (Spring/Summer 1994) IS PUNK DEAD? The Selling Of Punk: Green Day, Jawbox, Lawrence Livermore, Kurt Cobain obituary, Sinkhole

52 (Fall/Winter 1994) NEW BANDS ISSUE: The Figgs, Deadguy, Bouncing Souls, Madball, Ex-Vegas, WOOL, Sound Advice, lots more

#53 (Winter 1995) MAKING IT IN NEW YORK: A Special Report on the special problems and challenges faced by bands in NYC - interviews with Quicksand, Jeff Buckley, Xanax 25, plus an in-depth interview with punk legend Mike Watt, plus local bands, reviews, photos, columns, etc

#54 (Summer 1995) THE DO-IT-YOURSELF ISSUE: Tips on DIY projects like recording at home, putting on shows in your basement, running a DIY labels, & publishing a fanzine, including interviews with local notables who Do It Themselves; American Standard interview, NJ Hardcore Scene update, the usual reviews, photos, columns, and so on

#55 (Winter 1996) THE OLD PUNKS ISSUE: Into Another, Bill Stevenson of All, Keith Morris of Circle Jerks, Civ, Jawbreaker, Warp Tour photo essay, an old Freen Day interview, Urchins, Mars Needs Women,, and all the usual stuff.

#56 (Spring 1996) ABC No Rio: Behind The Scenes at the Scrungiest Punk Scene in America; interviews with ABC No Rio alumni including Hell No, Chisel, and an exclusive chat with Mike Bullshit; Melting Hopefuls, Resolve, Punk Tour Diary, SXSW Report, plus all that other crap.

#57 (Summer 1996) The SUBURBIA Issue: Weston, Trip 66, Kid With Man Head, plus Murphy's Law: The Jersey Beat Interview, Hoboken's Illness, Footstone, and lots, lots more.

#58 (Fall 1996) SCREECHING WEASEL: All The Dirt on Ben Weasel vs. Larry Livermore and Lookout; Descendents; Killer Kowalski; Punk Rock Tour Diaries from Kid With Man Head, Tommie Griggz, and Thirsty; R.I.P. Donny The Punk; CMJ '96 Report; Our Man At Lollapalooza '96; Cycomotogoat, Anthrophobia, and Railroad Earth; and all the usual crap.

#60 (Summer '97) H2O, The Dismemberment Plan, Sweetbelly Freakdown, Lunachicks, Aviso 'Hara, Bush Tetras, Evelyn Forever, W.E. Festival '97, Lollapalooza '97, Ben Weasel's "TV Eye" column, and yada yada yada.

#61 (Winter '97) BOUNCING SOULS, The Promise Ring, Everclear, Pat DiNizio, Kid With Man Head, Ben Weasel's "TV Eye" column, and tons more.

#62 (Spring '98) THE WRENS; Sweet Diesel, Ropetree, Ben Weasel's TV Eye, NJ Scene Report; A fond look back at the history of Maxwell's; tons of reviews, and all the other good stuff.

#63 (Fall '98) WHO CARES WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER? ISSUE - W.E. Fest, Warped Tour, Ryan O'Shea's Chicago Vacation Diary, Tommy Griggz/No Reason Tour Diary, Drag Pack Tour Diary; GIRLS AGAINST BOYS; Bob Fields, L.E.S. Stitches, Pansy Division: The Jersey Beat Interview; Mykel Board's eulogy for TimYohannon; Ben Weasel's TV Eye; and lots, lots more.

#64 (Winter '99) GENERATION EX: New bands with old faces - Jets To Brazil (ex Jawbreaker), Burning Airlines (ex Jawbox), New Rising Sons (ex Texas Is The Reason, Bold), The Jackie Papers (ex Pink Lincolns); BEN WEASEL interview, Electric Frankenstein, NJ Swing, Against All Authority, Mearth, Skarhead, McRackins, fluf, and plenty more where that came from!

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INSIDE HOBOKEN: A SPECIAL REPORT.
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- NEW BANDS.

#65 (Summer '99) BOUNCING SOULS, Teen Idols, Shades Apart, Indecision, Ducky Boys, Ben Kweller, Lillingtons, Garrison, Inspecter 7, SXSW '99, WE Festival '99, and on and on and on and....

#66 (Winter 2000) AGNOSTIC FRONT, Mr. T Experience, Blackout Records & The History of NY/HC, Down By Law, Bouncing Souls Tour Diary, Get Up Kids, The Pilfers, Y2KNJ: New Jersey's indie rock scene ponders the millennium... and all the usual goodies..

#67 (Summer 2000) SAVES THE DAY, THE LAPSE, Rainer Maria, The Anniversary, Radar Mercury, Novena, The Control Group, Tris McCall, Jim DeRogatis & the life and times of Lester Bangs, SXSW 2000, W.E. Festival 2000, plus about twenty-two kazillion reviews.

#68 (Winter 2001) THE QUEERS and Joe Queer's European Tour Diay, AVAIL, Plug Spark Sanjay, INSIDE HOBOKEN: An Intimate Look at the History of Hoboken's Indie Rock Scene, with Todd Abramson (Maxwell's), Glenn Morrow (Bar None Records,) and lots more... plus lots lots more, including a scazillion reviews and all our usual columns and goodies.

#69 (SPRING/SUMMER 2001) AMERICAN STANDARD, Jack Rabid, Joey Ramone: R.I.P., The Rosenbergs, Bane, True Love, Excerpt from Ben Weasel's novel *Like Hell*, local band round-up with Bastards Of Melody, Moths... plus all the usuals

#70 (WINTER 2001/2002) ADRENALIN OD, Burning Airlines, Midtown, Billy Milano, Thursday, Dashboard Confessional, Outline, Chris Butler, W.E. Festival 2001, Warped Tour 2001, and a kazillion reviews and all the usual columns.

#71 (20th Anniversary Issue – Spring/Summer 2002) RYE COALITION, Daniel Rey and the making of Joey Ramone's farewell CD, The Break, Weapons For Peace, The Negatones, Slow Wire, American Nightmare, Headwound, Gregg Yeti Vs. Kenyata Sullivan, NJ Shore Report, and enough reviews and columns to provide engrossing bathroom reading for weeks.

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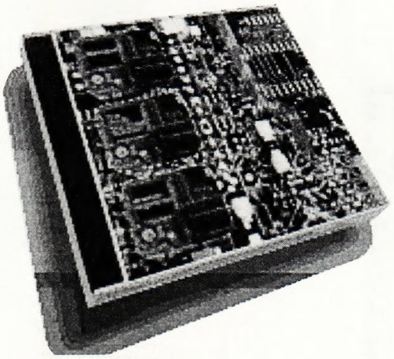

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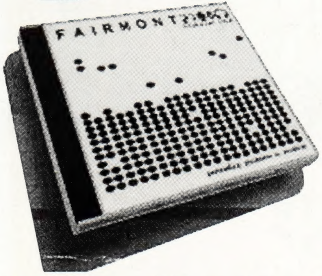

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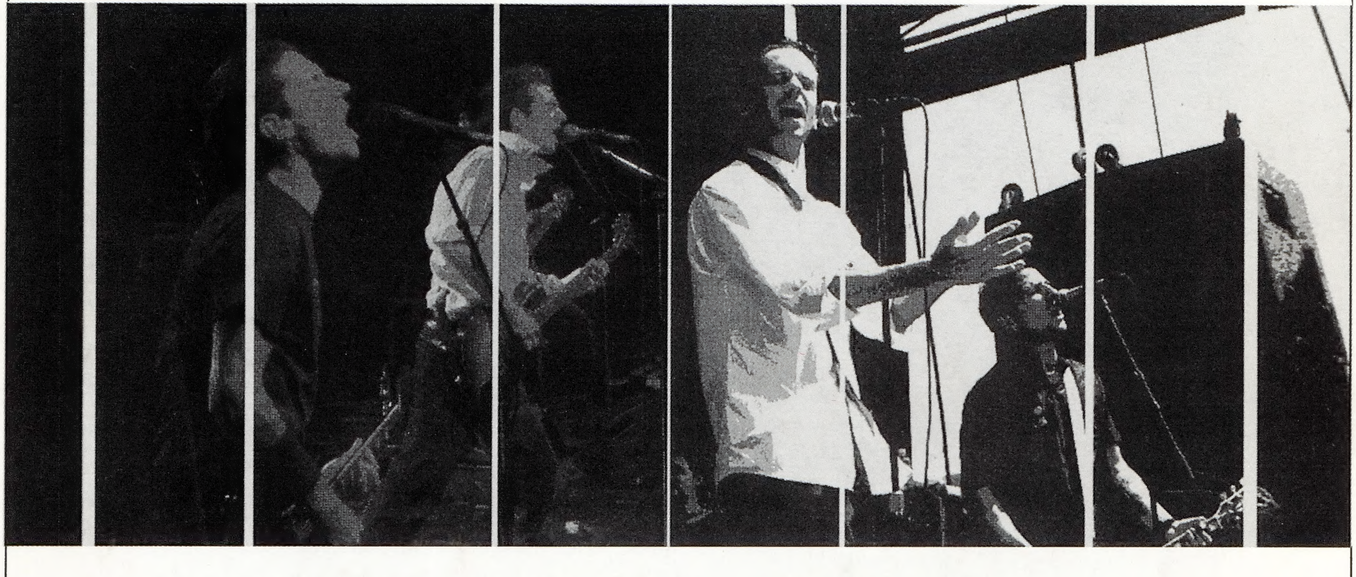

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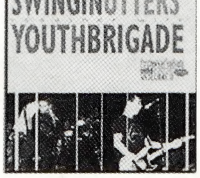
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